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**The Truth about Pawn Promotion:  
The Development of the Chess Motif in Victorian Fiction**

by

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B.A., McMaster University, 1991  
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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the  
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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

in the Department of English

We accept this dissertation as conforming  
to the required standard

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### ABSTRACT

A close critical scrutiny of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, and Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* reveals that these texts are linked through their use of a chess metaphor, a device that symbolizes how the central female characters of these works become stalemated in their efforts to achieve autonomy. While the disparate but related paths these characters take can be likened to the predetermined progress of a pawn that travels the length of a chessboard to become a queen, what Brontë, Hardy, and Carroll all recognize is that this process of becoming is by no means a fulfilling one. Rather, it only serves to reveal how trapped Helen, Elfride, and Alice are within a game in which Victorian society designates them as players of only secondary importance.

There is a general movement towards a more complex integration of the chess motif as we move from Brontë to Hardy and finally, to Carroll. Brontë's incidental chess scene is reminiscent of Thomas Middleton's use of a similar episode in *Women Beware Women*, and shows less sophistication than what Hardy or Carroll achieve because her moral realism lacks the creative touches found in either Hardy's use of symbolic imagery or Carroll's use of the fantastic and the unorthodox. However, Brontë juxtaposes her chess game with Helen's discovery of Huntingdon's infidelity to demonstrate how her heroine becomes trapped within a game that she is willingly coerced into playing.

If Brontë suggests that relationships are like chess games played according to rules that seriously limit a woman's ability to compete, Hardy goes to even greater lengths in

using chess to show how his Wessex universe operates as its own evolving game environment, replete with obstacles and conflicts that prove catastrophic for a player as unprepared as Elfride. Indeed, Hardy's allusion to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is critical in demonstrating how in matters of social game-playing, his heroine suffers from the unsatisfactory education she receives from her controlling father. Hardy shows greater sophistication than Brontë in using parallel chess episodes to comment on the progress of Elfride's relationships, and he even refers to a specific opening system in chess, the Muzio Gambit, whose catalogue of moves prefigures Elfride's romantic involvements with Stephen and Henry, as well as the unavoidable problems she encounters from the novel's vengeful Black Queen, Mrs. Jethway. Unlike Brontë, Hardy recognizes that fate is not so careful about giving individuals what they deserve, and that a character like Elfride can pay a heavy price for her romantic misdemeanours.

However, neither Brontë nor Hardy achieves what Carroll does in *Through the Looking-Glass*, a work that can be seen to follow in the tradition of Middleton's *A Game at Chess*, and which not only incorporates the game but structures its plot on the solution to an unorthodox chess problem. If Brontë is to be celebrated for her honest portrayal of a woman who becomes trapped in a destructive marriage, and Hardy can be commended for showing how his heroine's education in social game-playing undermines her relationships with men, Carroll's genius rests in his ability to illustrate these kinds of experiences on a chess board through Alice's dream of travelling across Looking-Glass land to become a queen. He does not simply give us the impression that a girl's progress towards womanhood is like a pawn's promotion in chess, but instead integrates these two

concepts into a single experience. He also keeps the reader off guard by creating an unorthodox chess problem and a curious cast of characters, giving us a sense of being caught in a game of our own. The result of all of this is that we are drawn into Carroll's games even as we view them as spectators, and the critical giddiness we experience in the process both helps us to share a sense of Alice's predicament in her frustrated quest to find fulfilment, and allows us to appreciate the underlying thematic implications of the chess motif in the narrative.

Examiners:

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Three common things of the world—a wife, a chess-board and a harp.  
--Welsh proverb

Chess is as much a mystery as women.  
--Cecil Purdy

Why had whoever, whatever individuals or group, who had invented modern chess, not made the king the strongest piece and the queen the weakest and not made the object of the game to protect the queen? That would have been any man's normal reaction, wouldn't it? Sheer male vanity would have demanded that. And yet whoever had invented it had done just the opposite. Had a woman invented the game?  
--James Jones

The Queen's move is aslant only, because women are so greedy that they will take nothing except by rapine and injustice.  
--From the *Innocent Morality*

There has never been a woman chess champion. With her instinctive intuition, a woman knows that chess is a frivolous waste of time which keeps men from paying due attention to her.  
--Clarence Thomas Sadd

They're all weak, all women. They're stupid compared to men. They shouldn't play chess, you know. They're like beginners. They lose every single game against a man.  
--Bobby Fischer

But if it is asked why the queen is exposed to war, when the condition of a female is frail and unwarlike, we reply, when husbands go out to battle, it is customary for their women and wives, and the rest of the family, to live in the camp. And though they do use a bow, and encumber men more by their whims than they destroy the foe by their valour, yet the queen is intended for the king's help.  
--From the *Gesta Romanorum*

'How should Erlend keep his thoughts on the game while you stand thus disturbing him? What would you here, Kristin? You have never had any skill of these games.'

'No; I trow you folks think I have no understanding of aught--'

'Of one thing I see you have no understanding' said her father sharply, 'and that is how it beseems a wife to speak to her husband. Better were it you should go and keep your young ones in bounds--'

--Sigrid Undset

## INTRODUCTION

Fancy what a game of chess would be if all the chessmen had passions and intellects, more or less small and cunning; if you were not only uncertain about your adversary's men, but a little uncertain also about your own; if your Knight could shuffle himself on to a new square on the sly; if your Bishop, in disgust at your Castling, could wheedle your Pawns out of their places; and if your Pawns, hating you because they are Pawns, could make away from their appointed posts that you might get checkmate on a sudden. You might be the longest-headed of deductive reasoners, and yet you might be beaten by your own Pawns. You would be especially likely to be beaten, if you depended arrogantly on your mathematical imagination, and regarded your passionate pieces with contempt.

Yet this imaginary chess is easy compared with a game a man has to play against his fellow-men with other fellow-men for his instruments.

—From George Eliot's *Felix Holt*

### 1. The Great Victorian Chess Scenes and Chess Novels

Shortly after its inception into western culture and once the Church accepted that it was not a heretical pursuit,<sup>1</sup> chess became acknowledged as a suitable metaphor for various human activities. Nonetheless, considering for a moment how medieval texts like *Huon of Bordeaux* (c. 1200) and *Garin de Montglane* (13th c.) use chess as a metaphor to demonstrate the necessity of preserving social and political hierarchies, and how a Renaissance playwright like Thomas Middleton, in *A Game at Chess* (1624), uses the game to represent the intrigue of the Anglo-Spanish conflict, one might be tempted to

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<sup>1</sup>Some early forms of the game used dice and thus were associated with gambling. In *A History of Chess* (1913), H. J. R. Murray refers to a letter written in AD 1061 by Petrus Damiani, Cardinal Bishop of Ostia, in which Damiani is able to convince the Bishop of Florence of the game's sinfulness: "The Bishop thought that if only he played chess without dice, he was keeping within canon law, but Damiani argues, 'No: the game is a dice game, and to omit the dice is a mere subterfuge or evasion. The canons forbid not merely the dice but the game also.' And the Bishop accepts the contention (which is quite a plausible one for any one who had seen chess generally played with dice, and who knew nothing of the history of chess) and acknowledges his fault" (409).

hypothesize that in a literary context the game is little more than a vehicle for allegory. However, the nineteenth-century writers examined in this dissertation recognized that in addition to serving as an allegorical construct, chess could be used as a metaphor for any complex system that subjects its participants to a set of binding rules under which they are compelled to play.<sup>2</sup> The exploration of this idea consequently brings together three Victorian texts which otherwise might have little chance of being juxtaposed for the purposes of critical analysis: Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), and Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872).

Cursory examinations of these works suggest that they share little more than the broad designation of "Victorian novel." Brontë's didactic tale is written with a pronounced moral agenda in an effort to warn readers against the dangers of profligacy and dissolution; Hardy's novel is a careful fusion of realism and ironic coincidence examining the failure of individuals to communicate; and Carroll's nonsense fiction is a philosophical fantasy story that satirizes Victorian society while trying to come to terms with the ephemeral nature of human existence. However, a closer examination of these works reveals a number of important similarities: (1) each has suffered the censure of

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<sup>2</sup>There do not appear to be any significant examples of the chess game being used as a prominent literary motif in eighteenth-century English fiction. It is difficult to say whether this was due to the rise in popularity of card games during this period (for instance, Alexander Pope uses the game of *ombre* in "The Rape of the Lock") or because writers felt that the metaphor had been sufficiently explored. Something else to consider is that throughout the period in question the centre of the chess world was not England but France, with Philidor and his circle making the *Café de la Régence* the first modern chess club.

critical scholarship, especially in comparison with other works written either by the same author or by other prominent Victorians; (2) each has received considerable recognition for its radicalism in examining Victorian issues; (3) finally, and most significantly for our purposes, each uses the game of chess as a metaphor in chronicling the experiences of a young female character as she endures (symbolically in Alice's case) the trials of becoming an adult.

A number of contemporary critics have recognized *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as a landmark feminist text, but it had long been unfavourably compared with the works of Anne's more celebrated sisters, Charlotte and Emily. Although critics are by no means incorrect in suggesting that *Tenant* lacks the psychological complexity of *Jane Eyre* (1847) or *Wuthering Heights* (1847), the novel has unnecessarily suffered from the dismissive labels imposed on it by earlier scholars, beginning with Charlotte's disparaging comments in her preface to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*. Charlotte claims that Anne had made a poor choice of subject in her second novel:

She had, in the course of her life, been called on to contemplate near at hand, and for a long time, the terrible effects of talents misused and faculties abused; hers was a naturally sensitive, reserved and dejected nature; what she saw sank very deeply into her mind: it did her harm. She brooded over it till she believed it to be a duty to reproduce every detail (of course, with fictitious characters, incidents and situations), as a warning to others. (qtd in Andrews 27)

This critical attitude has been perpetuated in our own century by such critics as Winifred Gérin and Margaret Lane, the latter of whom in *The Drug-Like Brontë Dream* (1952) patronizingly designates Anne "as 'a Brontë without genius,' but as one who certainly had her share of the Brontë temperament" (Lane 31). For her own part, Gérin makes the

unconvincing argument that the didactic nature of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* precludes it from having literary merit: "It was written too obviously as a work of propaganda, a treatise against drunkenness, to be considered a work of art" (Gérin 39). This sort of argument has proven damaging to the text because it discourages the critical reader from investigating the novel on anything more than a superficial level, and it is only through the combined efforts of contemporary critics that Brontë's work has managed to receive a fair assessment.

Hardy's third novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, has been critically pilloried for its lapses in realism, characterization of rural life, and choice of narrative structure. Indeed, instead of recognizing the text as having literary merit in itself, numerous critics have only assigned it value as either an example of the weaknesses of Hardy's early writing, or as a precursor to his later and more celebrated novels, specifically *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895). The critical scholarship of Edmund Blunden, Lascelles Abercrombie, and J. I. M. Stewart is too focused on trying to expose the novel's artistic inconsistencies to be concerned with Hardy's complex handling of the chess metaphor. For example, while discussing the novel in *Thomas Hardy* (1941), Blunden negates the text before allowing himself a reasonable opportunity to investigate it: "We do not get far in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* before we are entertained, not as the author can have intended us to be, by his remarkable spasms of contorted and straggling English" (190). Naturally, this approach can only lead to imprudent attempts to remedy the text by adopting a corrective strategy:

Hardy in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* begins to work in a cause which moved him strongly—the boy Smith is not of the social rank of Elfride, and there lies

the foundation for the real tragedy, thence could have proceeded the drama, towards a triumphal or a lamentable end, which would have employed these lovers as symbols of a far wider world than themselves. Or again, in the sketchy character of Knight, I believe that there is the sufficient source for a complete story with a combination of love's winding ways and of a special dilemma in it--the effect of a great intellectual passion and pursuit upon the man's capacities and experiences in emotional relations. (Blunden 196-97)

This sort of critical mindset has prevented a number of scholars from recognizing how a close scrutiny of the particulars of Hardy's novel, specifically his use of a controlling chess metaphor, can benefit textual analysis. Indeed, by recognizing how this particular motif is part of a larger conceptual scheme in the text, the critical reader can begin to understand how Hardy's Wessex operates as its own evolving game environment.

Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* is often seen by scholars as a less successful novel than its more celebrated companion piece, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Critics have interpreted *Looking-Glass* as the more controlled and less spontaneous of the two works, more the product of Dodgson the mathematical logician and Oxford lecturer than Carroll the story-teller. Thus, although it has been assigned a higher place than either of the critically disparaged *Sylvie and Bruno* books (1889 and 1893), it has been unfavourably compared with its companion novel since its publication:

There was general agreement, among those who considered the question, that *Through the Looking-Glass* was not so good as its predecessor. The reasons given for this varied. It was perhaps too contrived--"Mr. Carroll makes rather too much use here of the Red and White pieces in the game of chess"--or not so inventive.<sup>3</sup> Possibly the expectations raised by *Alice's*

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<sup>3</sup>The quotation that Cripps cites is from *The Illustrated London News* (Dec. 16, 1871, p. 599). She also refers to a review of the novel given in *The Manchester Guardian* (Dec. 27, 1871, p. 3.) which sees an unequivocal discrepancy between the two novels: "A continuation of a book that has proved very popular seldom is successful, and

*Adventures* were so high that no sequel could hope to meet them adequately. (Cripps 40)

In "Escape Through the Looking-Glass" (1945), Florence Becker Lennon calls the novel a "masterpiece—only a shade less than *Wonderland*" (Lennon 66), but then adds that "it already exudes the ripe flavor of approaching decay and disintegration into the cruel (on paper) and unusual Mr. Dodgson and the sentimental-religious Louisa Caroline, as one of the Oxford parodists signed 'The Vulture and the Husbandman'" (66). Harold Bloom takes a similar position in his introduction to *Lewis Carroll* (1987): "The movement from 'You're nothing but a pack of cards!' to 'I can't stand this any longer!' is a fair representation of the relative aesthetic decline the reader experiences as she goes from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* to *Through the Looking-Glass*. Had the first book never existed, our regard for the second would be unique and immense, which is only another way of admiring how the first *Alice* narrative is able to avoid any human affect as mundane as bitterness" (5-6). However, the sardonic tone that runs throughout *Looking-Glass* is central to its thematic complexity, and the notion that it lacks the spontaneity or freshness of its predecessor should not in itself be a source of criticism.

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we cannot say that we think Alice's last adventures by any means equal to her previous ones. Making every allowance for the lack of novelty, and our own more highly raised expectation, it seems to us that the parodies are somewhat less delightfully absurd, the nonsense not so quaint, the transitions rather more forced" (40). With respect to the novel's early critical reception by children, Cripps admits that both *Wonderland* and *Looking-Glass* were still among the most popular children's books even at the time of Carroll's death, but not necessarily equally esteemed: "The *Pall Mall Gazette*, for instance, in an article entitled 'What the Children Like,' gave the result of a request to children to list their favourite books. 'To pass to the positive, the verdict is so natural that it will surprise no normal person. The winner is 'Alice in Wonderland'; 'Through the Looking-Glass' is in the twenty, but much lower down. Perfectly correct'" (42).

Although each of the works under discussion has received a significant amount of critical censure, each has also gained attention for its surprising radicalism. Contemporary critics have demonstrated an ability to overcome the traditional prejudices that have prevented deeper investigations of these works in the past and have subsequently discovered in them a number of subversively modern ideas.<sup>4</sup> In "'Imbecile Laughter' and 'Desperate Earnest' in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" (1982), Juliet McMaster rejects the notion that she should try to defend Brontë's novel rather than simply investigate it: "I proceed on the assumption that *The Tenant* is a fine and important Victorian novel that deserves serious critical attention as a work of fiction, and apart from biographical considerations" (352). From this critical position, McMaster is able to concentrate on how the structural and thematic pattern of the story-within-a-story "is supported at the dramatic level by the vivid delineation of irresponsible laughter and moral seriousness in the sayings and doings of characters" (368). In effect, the critic argues that Brontë demonstrates an awareness not only of the dangers of dissolution and profligacy or of the moral standards that differentiated the Regency and Victorian periods, but by associating these different standards with her characters she shows her acute (and remarkably contemporary) understanding of the inequitable distributions of social power to men and women in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>4</sup>See, for instance, Barbara and Gareth Lloyd Evans's *Everyman's Companion to the Brontës* (1982), Edward Chitham's and Tom Winniffrith's *Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems* (1983), N. M. Jacobs's "Gender and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" (*Journal of Narrative Technique* 16: [1986]), and Jan B. Gordon's "Gossip, Diary, Letter, Text: Anne Brontë's Narrative *Tenant* and the Problematic of the Gothic Sequel" (*ELH* 51: [1984]).

In "The Question of Credibility in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*" (1982), Arlene M. Jackson acknowledges that Brontë's writing lacks the qualities which have made *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* canonical texts, but implies that this should not prevent critics from appreciating the important contribution of a novel like *Tenant*: "Without the searing intensity of Charlotte or the dramatic inventiveness of Emily, however, Anne demonstrates through her writing that she has a conscious, perceptive control of her fictional materials. This control gives Anne Brontë a claim to artistic merit in her own right" (198). Jackson recognizes that the often brutal realism of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* has a way of exploding Victorian myths about gender roles in "revealing a marital discord full of suffering, agony, and even ugliness" (200). Thus, like McMaster, Jackson understands the novel's uniqueness in the way it asks bold questions about the power structures that define sexual relationships during the Victorian period:

Anne Brontë also answers a question that other novels of her time do not ask: what happens to a marriage and to the innocent partner when one partner (specifically, the male) leads a solipsistic life, where personal pleasures are seen as deserved, where maleness and the role of husband is tied to the freedom to do as one wants, and femaleness and the role of wife is linked to providing service and pleasure not necessarily sexual, but including daily praise and ego-boosting and, quite simply, constant attention. (203)

Although she acknowledges Anne's limitations as a writer in the opening paragraph of her article, Jackson is able to set these aside and concentrate on specific gender issues in the novel that are deserving of elucidation and critical commentary.

Recent critics have also done a significant service to Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* in re-evaluating elements of the novel that have been traditionally reproached. For instance, in *Thomas Hardy's Heroines: A Chorus of Priorities* (1986), Pamela Jekel

begins by observing that "[i]n an exploration of the critical commentary available on the character of Elfride Swancourt, it seems clear that many reviewers have misunderstood—and consequently misrepresented—one of Hardy's most provocative and revealing heroines" (44). Jekel recognizes that although critics like Norman Page and D. H. Lawrence make perceptive insights into Elfride's characterization, their arguments prove limiting and underestimate both her strength and complexity of character:

Lawrence's implication is that, indeed, the tragedy is not very great at all, since Elfride has not had the strength to throw off even "the first little hedge of convention." In fact, the story of Elfride is at least poignant if not a classical tragedy, precisely because she does have the potential for such strength, because she does have many heroic qualities, and because she is betrayed by love—both false and true—and sadly, betrayed with her own complicity. (45)

Thus, the critic acknowledges that Hardy gives Elfride sufficient complexity that her striving for happiness and control over her life becomes heroic, "and that the inability of most to see that truth, creates Hardy's ironic tone and, ultimately, his pessimism" (51-52). Although Jekel is at times highly critical of Hardy's text,<sup>5</sup> she recognizes and appreciates those elements of the novel that make it decidedly modern: "Hardy explores still-uncharted psychological frontiers, behaviours and explanations for them which were not then familiar. His instructive understanding of the reasons for Knight's 'spare love-making' and Elfride's distaste for Stephen's 'pretty,' almost feminine handsomeness, gives the novel a contemporary flavour in spite of its gothic construction" (55).

In *Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (1988), Rosemarie Morgan sees *A Pair of Blue Eyes* as a radical text in which Hardy strikes back against the

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<sup>5</sup>These criticisms are addressed in Chapter 2.

Victorian convention of regarding female sexuality as a pathological disorder and denying women a sexual reality (2). For her, the "contradictions and shifting perspectives" (28) which critics frequently cite as evidence of the novel's faulty construction are crucial to Hardy's textual strategy: "Alternatively displacing and reinstating his heroine as he grapples with propriety on the one hand and an unconventional characterization on the other, Hardy ingeniously maps a course of increasingly fruitless voyages to mirror that unrewarding journey to womanhood which offers no prizes to the female challenger" (28). Morgan notes that only through a process of meticulous critical scrutiny can the novel's inconsistencies be understood as part of a literary stratagem that takes a radical approach to the exploration of gender issues: "The more important part of this analysis... lies in the close attentive reading that is, to my mind, critical to an understanding of Hardy's radicalism, his defiance of convention, his rejection of prevailing sexual codes and practices, his commitment to the sexual reality of his women" (28).

Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* has also been recognized for its surprising radicalism despite being very much a literary product of its time. Although it is not traditionally thought of as a feminist novel in the way that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* or *A Pair of Blue Eyes* are often re-appraised by contemporary critics, *Through the Looking-Glass* is nevertheless recognized for its keen understanding of Alice's predicament, most notably in her discovery that "being a Queen...offers neither the security of attachment nor the sovereignty of freedom to which she refers in her opening words to the White Knight: 'I don't want to be anybody's prisoner. I want to be a Queen'" (Rackin 113). As Susan A. Walsh argues in "Darling Mothers, Devilish

Queens: The Divided Woman in Victorian Fantasy" (1987), Carroll shows how Alice is ultimately a prisoner of her inability to change the game in which she finds herself because her only models of behaviour are the helpless but amiable White Queen and the responsible but mean-tempered Red Queen:

By the end of both Wonderland books a beleaguered Alice has had enough and summarily shatters the dream worlds by withdrawing belief in the system of relationships they espouse...Even though she recognizes the artificial quality of this maddening disorder, that these games...are constructs of culture and not of nature, Alice can not exert control from the outside because the "inside" dictates the terms of what she must control. As a world-spinner she may exercise the creator's prerogative to destroy her fictions but not, ultimately, to invest them with forms other than those provided by nineteenth-century convention. (34)

The subversive irony of Carroll's novel, of course, is that while it appears to have the happily-ever-after ending of a traditional children's story, Alice's promotion to a Queen only comes to represent the crowning moment of her powerlessness. The bitterness that is engendered throughout Alice's frustrating quest and which culminates during the coronation feast gives the novel its insurgent tone. Indeed, Harold Bloom's earlier criticism of the novel's bitterness is qualified by his admission that this is perhaps what gives the novel its modern appeal: "Bitterness keeps breaking in as we read *Through the Looking-Glass*, which may explain how weirdly and perpetually contemporary this second and somewhat lesser work now seems" (6).

Carroll's novel shows its modernism (and to a certain extent, its postmodernism) in a number of other ways; if the author's mathematical forays into the realm of symbolic logic make his work a natural precursor to Bertrand Russell's and Alfred North Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* (1910-1913), and his interest in the possibilities of

language look forward to Joyce, then his fascination with sign systems in the *Alice* books makes him a forerunner to contemporary approaches to the field of semiotics:

Carroll's concerns extend beyond the explication of communication functions to probe the provocative semiotic question argued by Humpty Dumpty: "who is to be master?" we over the signs we manipulate, or the signs over us through the subtle pressures exerted by convention and conditioning? In Carroll's universe, the "masters" of signification are poets, logicians, and madmen. Through his use of imagery and parable to illustrate his humorous exposé of the problems of semiosis, Carroll reveals a profound concern with underlying epistemological issues which anticipate neo-Kantian and Saussurian approaches to that branch of science known as "semiotic." (Mandelker 102)

Finally, Carroll's use of nested structures in making Alice a pawn within a game within a pair of conflicting dreams looks forward to twentieth-century writers like Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortazar, who manipulate traditional linear narrative structures and invest them with topological complexity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Topology is the branch of mathematics dealing with the qualitative study of abstract spaces. Anticipated and developed through the combined energies of Euler, Moebius, Cantor and others, and eventually emerging in 1895 with Poincaré's *Analysis Situs*, topology serves as an approach to spatial configurations that "typifies a sharp break from the styles prevailing in nineteenth-century analysis" (Boyer 652-53). It acknowledges that structurally disparate spaces are equivalent if they can be mapped to one another by a continuous function. For instance, certain geometrical shapes differ substantially in their Cartesian structure, but topology recognizes them as equivalent, or *homeomorphic*, if they can be shown to be continuous deformations of one other. The fundamental goal of topology is to discover "a serviceable set of rules or procedures for recognizing spaces in all dimensions. In such a classification scheme, two spaces would belong to the same topological class if they had the same basic, overall structure although they might differ drastically in their details" (*Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia*).

The notion of a connected network provides a fundamental link between mathematical topology and chess, a game that involves an ever-evolving network of choices leading to a limitless number of possible outcomes. In *The Inner Game of Chess*, Andrew Soltis observes that calculation in chess has a definite shape: "A calculated sequence resembles a tree; branches represent the subvariations, and the trunk represents the sequence's main line" (Soltis 84). By recognizing that chess serves as a metaphor not only for hierarchical systems but for the whole process of assessment and decision,

Although they share profound similarities in the way they have been both censured for their perceived artistic deficiencies and critically lauded for their radicalism, the works under investigation are most readily linked through their use of chess as a metaphor to investigate the fate of their female protagonists as they endure the trials of becoming an adult. Brontë's incorporation of a chess metaphor in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* shows less sophistication than what Hardy or Carroll manage to achieve in their respective narratives, but although the game between Helen Huntingdon and Walter Hargrave is incidental and does not appear to be allusively connected with other parts of the novel, it is juxtaposed with Helen's discovery of Huntingdon's infidelity to emphasize the game's importance as a metaphor for the difficulties faced by a woman who is forced to play games controlled by men.

If Brontë demonstrates that relationships are like chess games played according to rules that seriously limit a woman's ability to compete, Hardy goes to even greater lengths in using chess to show how his Wessex universe operates as its own evolving game environment, replete with conflicts and cross-purposed goals that prove catastrophic for a player as unprepared as Elfride. Indeed, Hardy's impressionable heroine is the novel's principal player and quintessential plaything, the engineer of positional combinations and daring sacrifices, and the overprotected but isolated piece striving to

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topological analysis provides a way of rendering textual meaning comprehensible on previously unaccessible levels. As a topology, chess does not simply relate characters and events to those of the game—it is not merely the vehicle for allegorical analysis—but supplies the reader with the necessary tools to interpret the textual universe as its own evolving game environment, and as a part of the much larger arena in which the author and reader are constantly at play.

find its place on the field of social combat. Hardy shows a greater level of sophistication than Brontë in using parallel chess episodes to comment on the progress and eventual failure of Elfride's relationships. He even goes to the extent of referring to a specific opening system in the game of chess, the Muzio Gambit, whose catalogue of moves prefigures not only Elfride's romantic involvements with Stephen Smith and Henry Knight, but the unavoidable problems in which she becomes involved with the novel's vengeful Black Queen, Mrs. Jethway. Brontë assigns each character the fate they deserve, with Huntingdon meeting a grim demise for his profligacy and Helen finding happiness with Markham after years of suffering, but Hardy recognizes that fate is not so careful about giving individuals what they deserve, and that a character like Elfride can be forced to pay a heavy price for seemingly harmless romantic misdemeanours.

However, neither Brontë nor Hardy is quite able to achieve with the chess metaphor what Carroll does in *Through the Looking-Glass*, a novel that not only incorporates the game of chess but whose plot is structured on the solution to an unorthodox chess problem that is played out by Alice and the Looking-Glass chessmen. If Brontë can be praised for her realistic portrayal of a woman who becomes trapped in a destructive marriage, and Hardy is to be commended for capturing how his heroine's education in social game-playing problematizes her relationships with men, Carroll's genius rests in his ability to illustrate these kinds of experiences on a chess board through Alice's dream of being a pawn and travelling across the Looking-Glass landscape to become a queen. Carroll does not simply give us the impression that a girl's progress towards womanhood is something like a pawn's promotion in chess, but rather he fully

integrates these two ideas into a single experience.

Carroll keeps the reader constantly off guard through his creation of an unorthodox chess problem and a curious cast of characters, the *Dramatis Personae*, giving us a sense of being perpetually caught somewhere between recognition and confusion, and encouraging our immediate identification with Alice. The novel creates a series of games for the reader whose answers often lead to more difficult questions, just as one's analysis of a chess position becomes more difficult as the player is forced to look further and further ahead. While Alice is made to run quickly in order to stay in the same place and distribute Looking-Glass plum cake before cutting it, we are similarly confronted with numerous nonsense puzzles and exercises in mathematical logic. The result of all of this is that we are drawn into the game even as we view it as spectators, and the critical giddiness we experience in the process both helps us to share some sense of Alice's predicament in her frustrated quest to find fulfilment, and allows us to appreciate the underlying thematic implications of the chess motif in the narrative.

## 2. The Tradition of the Chess Motif

### 2.1. The Medieval Period

By using chess in their narratives, Brontë, Hardy, and Carroll are drawing on a literary tradition that stretches back through the Renaissance to the Middle Ages. As the historian H. J. R. Murray observes in *A History of Chess* (1913), the game was readily incorporated into medieval literature as a tool for allegory: "It will be a matter for no surprise to any one familiar with the characteristics of European literature of the Middle Ages to discover that works were written in which attempts were made to give a

symbolical or allegorical explanation of the game of chess, or to find parallels between the organization of human life and activities and the different names and powers of the chessmen" (529).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, chess is a recurring motif in medieval literature, frequently serving as a metaphor of the divinely ordered nature of the universe, and of the individual human being's socially ordained place within it. In medieval texts, the chess board is viewed as a microcosm of the field of universal conflict. The chess pieces symbolize the human forces involved in that conflict as well as the divine providence that carefully oversees the divisions of relative human worth on the great chain of being. The game

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<sup>7</sup>Medieval chess moralities collectively reinforce the logic of social and political hierarchies by showing how this logic is reflected in the game. The oldest of these works is the *Quaedam moralitas de scaccario*, or *Innocent Morality*, in which the descriptions of the chess board and its pieces are given in terms of what these things symbolically parallel in the world of human experience: "The world resembles a chessboard which is chequered white and black, the colours showing the two conditions of life and death, or praise and blame. The chessmen are men of this world who have a common birth, occupy different stations and hold different titles in this life, who contend together, and finally have a common fate which levels all ranks. The king often lies under the other pieces in this bag" (qtd. in Murray 530). Eales observes that in the wake of the *Quaedam moralitas*, eight new chess moralities were written between 1250 and 1475, all of which appear to use the game's allegorical possibilities to urge a maintenance of the status quo. Evidence of this can be found in the *Gesta Romanorum*: "Though all men may be equal in death (after the game), they are certainly not equal in life (during the game): 'And therefore let us not change of our estates, no more than the chessmen, when they be put away in the bag. Then there is no difference who be above or who be beneath, and so by the Spirit of Lowliness we may come to the joy of Heaven'" (qtd. in Eales 66). Eales goes on to add that the same sentiment is expressed in the *Innocent Morality*, which "urged common men to plod steadily onwards like pawns, not deviating in order to gain possessions or improve their situation, the better to reach salvation and their true reward" (66). Perhaps the most important of medieval chess moralities, Jacobus de Cessolis's *Liber de moribus* "drew on the notion, already prevalent, that chess was a symbolic representation of society and imparted to that notion a much greater force and precision" (67). For instance, although de Cessolis recognized that pawns in chess were essentially the same, he differed from previous writers by explaining each individually in terms of the profession it represented (66-67).

itself represents the symbolic, ordered interaction of these human and divine forces, serving to play and replay the medieval concept of the universe in miniature. Medieval literary texts featuring chess games reinforce the wisdom of respecting social and political hierarchies, and the dangers that can arise when these hierarchies are foolishly challenged.

For instance, medieval myths concerning the origins of chess were devised in an effort to validate the hierarchical nature of medieval European society and to discourage those who would question it. These myths were important in that "since chess was a man-made diversion, any meaning concealed within it could hardly be inherent in nature like arithmetic or harmonic relationships; it must have been put there by the original inventor" (Eales 64). The most commonly accepted legend concerning the game's genesis was that it had been invented by a wise man as a means for corrective instruction. The effectiveness of the myth lies in its deep-seated parallels with certain biblical stories that deal not simply with divine correction, but the theme of humanity as the archetypal overreacher. For example, as the biblical origin of linguistic difference represented in the Tower of Babel myth sees language serving as an agent of both punishment and reform, the very same can be said concerning chess, and its mythical genesis as a medium for corrective instruction. In at least two European legends that deal with the origins of the game, chess functions as an instrument for altering the behaviour of despotic rulers who have ruthlessly murdered their fathers:

In the first, an Eastern philosopher invents the game in the reign of Evil Merodach, regularly presented in the Middle Ages as a monstrous sadist. Evil Merodach chopped up the body of his father Nebuchadnezzar into three hundred pieces and threw them to three hundred vultures. Wise men

then invented chess to cure him of his madness. The other version of this story has a philosopher called Justus inventing chess in order to reform a tyrant, Juvenilis. In both these stories the son murders his father and a wise man invents the game as therapy. (Cockburn 100)

Just as God's confounding of language among the men and women at Babel foils their hubristic challenge, chess thwarts the realization of murderous fantasies through the process of sublimation, by replaying the crime of father murder in a circumscribed game environment. God occupies humanity in a game of frustrated communication, which prevents them from continuing their sinful and hubristic construction of the Tower, and chess occupies Meradoch and Juvenilis in a game that sublimates their patricidal tendencies. Within the context of the Babel myth, linguistic difference is a mark of man's post-lapsarian nature; it is a reminder both of the sinful act and of God's carefully devised solution. Similarly, the patricide myths surrounding the origins of chess suggest that the game both reenacts Merodach's murder of Nebuchadnezzar (or Juvenilis's murder of his father) and represents the solution to violence. Just as the Babel legend would have recalled the error of human ambition, the medieval player must have certainly recognized—as he or she was no doubt meant to—that the legends about chess revealed the folly of overstepping one's pre-ordained station in life.

Medieval literature also inaugurates the convention of the woman either playing chess against a male counterpart or serving as the object of a game played between male adversaries. In *Garin de Montglane*, a French poem of the Charlemagne cycle, the King challenges the renowned Garin to a high-stakes chess game: "If Garin wins he is to have the realm of France and Charlemagne's Queen to wife; if he loses he is to lose his head" (Murray 737). After some hesitation, Garin accepts the stakes, defeats Charlemagne, and

finds himself in the position to lay claim to France, but he refuses to take advantage and instead accepts the town of Montglane (737). Garin understands that while winning the game does not undermine it as a metaphor of divine order, claiming the stake does because it renders meaningless the preservation of divinely ordained hierarchies. However, there are no such choices available to Charlemagne's wife; as the object of the chess game, she is forced to await passively its outcome.

In *Floire et Blanchefleur* (12th c.), a woman is once again depicted as the passive object of a chess game; the hero uses chess to rescue a maiden held captive in a Saracen prison, not by bold and bloody means, but by cleverly tricking the porter: "He learns that the porter of the prison is very covetous and a keen chess-player, and uses this knowledge to gain access to the dungeon. He induces the porter to challenge him to play at chess, and refuses to play except for a considerable wager. They play on three successive days, and Floire allows the porter to win on each occasion. The porter wins the stakes...but Floire obtains admission to the prison" (Murray 737).

In *Huon of Bordeaux*, King Yvorin's daughter is both a player and the stake of her chess game with Huon: "yf she wyne thou shalt lese thy hede / & yf thou canst mate her...thou shalt haue her one nyght in thy bed / to do with her at thy pleasure, & a c. marke of money there with" (Murray 738). Although the daughter has superior chess skills, she is unable to prevent herself from falling in love with Huon during the course of the game and subsequently loses, but the hero releases the King from the wager for

a hundred marks (Murray 738).<sup>8</sup> The tale makes clear that King Yvorin's daughter is a victim of her inability to control her passion, and despite the fact that she seems to be given the opportunity to compete on level terms, her ability to defeat Huon is undermined by the stakes for which they are playing.

## 2.2. The Renaissance<sup>9</sup>

The use of symbolic or allegorical chess games in English Renaissance literature is certainly indebted to the works we have been discussing, but it is by no means limited by them. The most prominent examples of literary chess metaphors during this period

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<sup>8</sup>Despite his chicanery, Huon understands his position in the social hierarchy and wisely exercises moral restraint when the situation arises. The hero recognizes that it is not his place to hold the king to his promise, and like Garin, he accepts a token in return.

<sup>9</sup>During the latter part of the fifteenth century, chess underwent sudden and significant changes to its quietly evolving medieval form: "Suddenly castling was introduced, pawns gained the privilege of moving two squares forwards at their first turn, and the queen was transformed at a stroke from a waddling cripple (the Arabic vizier) to a unit of devastating ferocity" (Keene 24). With these additional powers of movement afforded to the various pieces, chess was transformed from the static and predictable contest of old into a more dynamic and unpredictable game.

In medieval chess, the queen's movement was limited to one diagonal square in any direction. This factor alone made the game considerably slower than we know it, because the queen was denied the extensive movement and scope of her contemporary counterpart. Because the medieval queen had to be diagonally adjacent to the enemy in order to attack it, an opponent could generally prepare to counter the threat. In contrast, the modern queen can attack a combination of pieces from various regions of the board, and can often do so in the course of a single move, making one's defence against such an attack significantly more difficult. The queen's ability to initiate attacks was also helped by the implementation of a double-move first move for the pawns. In the medieval game, pawns were only permitted to move one square forward at a time, but the new rule allowed for the immediate centralization of both the pawns and the pieces. To counteract these heightened abilities of attack, castling was incorporated as a dynamic defensive move which brought the king to the safety of the corner while mobilizing one of the rooks for activity in the centre. Ultimately, the changes that took place in chess during the late Medieval and early Renaissance periods turned what was becoming little more than a tedious and often predictable exercise in logic into an increasingly more dynamic game.

are found in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) and both Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (c. 1621) and *A Game at Chess* (1624),<sup>10</sup> works in which the game's metaphorical possibilities are explored with varying degrees of complexity. Chess itself was becoming part of an increasingly complex debate which manifested itself in the contradictory social attitudes towards the game that could be found in technical chess manuals and other literary texts of the time, such as courtesy books.

In effect, the Renaissance gentleman was encouraged by one group of critics to have a thorough knowledge of chess because of the intellectual exercise it afforded, and discouraged by others from spending a great deal of time studying the game. For instance, Thomas Elyot's *The Governour* (1531) celebrates chess for its ability to sharpen a player's intellectual faculties:

The chesse, of all games wherin is no bodily exercise, is moste to be commended; for therein is right subtile engine, whereby the wytte is made more sharpe and remembrance quickened. And it is the more commendable and also commodiouse if the players haue radde the moralization of the chesse, and when they playe do think upon it: which bokes be in englishe. But they be very scarce, be cause fewe men do seekee in plaies for vertue or wisdom. (qtd. in Knight and Guy 1)

Similarly, in *The Haven of Health and Information Made for the Comfort of Students* (1612), Thomas Cogan promotes the game as a source of mental calisthenics for young scholars: "This ancient game called the Chesse is an earnest exercise of the minde and convenient for students, and may easily be provided to be alwaies readie in their

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<sup>10</sup>*Women Beware Women* was not entered into the Stationer's Register until 1653, a considerable period of time after Middleton's death (Carroll *WBW*, xiii). However, although there has been controversy in dating the play, most scholars agree that the evidence points to 1621 rather than an earlier date like 1613-14 (xiii-xiv).

chambers" (qtd in Knight and Guy 2). In addition, Arthur Saul's *The Famous Game of Chesse-Play* (1614) implies that the game deserves a better reputation, not simply because of the intellectual skill it demands but because it is free of those undesirable qualities often associated with other table games:

O that this game were rightly esteemed of, according to his worth: It is many yeeres since I could play this game, and as yet I neuer knew any fall out at the same: for a man cannot be offended with him who he playeth withall, but rather blame himselfe for not gouerning his owne men better...it is apparant what quarrels and sodaine stabbings happen at other games, with cheating and cosening one another, from all which enormities this is free, hauing the glory about all other games, for a peaceable and a Princely exercise. (Saul n.pag)

Knight and Guy also cite the passionate appeal of William Drummond of Hawthornden in his *Epistle in Works* (1655): "But if we shall have a desire of change of thoughts, let us not refuse the Chesse, the onely Princely Game (next Government) in the World, yes the true image and pourtraiet of it, and training of Kings" (2).

However, Baldisare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1527) argues that chess can put an unreasonable demand on those who seek to master it: "anyone who wishes to become an outstanding player must...give to it as much time and study as he would to learning some noble science or performing well something or other of importance; and yet for all his pains when all is said and done all he knows is a game. Therefore as far as chess is concerned we reach what is a very rare conclusion: that mediocrity is more to be praised than excellence" (qtd in Eales 78). While Castiglione warns the player to strive for mediocrity, his advice is by no means as critical of the game as that found in Michel Eyquem de Montaigne's *Les Essais* (1580): "To what degree does this ridiculous diversion molest the soul, when all her energies are summoned together upon this trivial

account" (qtd in Knight and Guy 6). In the *Basilikon Doron* (1598), James VI of Scotland observes that instead of relieving men from thoughts of their worldly affairs, chess rather "filleth and troubleth men's heads with as many fashious toys of the play, as before it was filled with thoughts of his affairs" (qtd in Eales 78-79). Similarly, Robert Burton in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) contends that occupying the mind with chess is unhealthy if it proceeds from too much study: "in such a case it may do more harm than good" (qtd in Eales 79). Thus, players were advised that chess was both beneficial and insidious, and that while it could illuminate those who studied its complexities, its status as a game put it in conflict with the serious concerns of real life.

It was in the midst of this critical debate that Shakespeare and Middleton chose to explore the metaphorical possibilities of the chess game in their plays. However, although *The Tempest*, *Women Beware Women*, and *A Game at Chess* are separated by only thirteen years, each of these plays uses chess towards very different ends. Middleton employs an incidental chess scene in *Women Beware Women*, juxtaposing a game played between Livia and Leantio's mother with the Duke's seduction of Bianca, and shows the relationship between two different but related games of deception. As Guardiano treacherously leads Bianca to her moral ruin, the players on the lower stage take part in a highly suggestive chess game:

LIVIA

Alas, poor widow, I shall be too hard for thee.

MOTHER

Y'are cunning at the game, I'll be sworn, madam.

LIVIA

It will be found so, ere I give you over.

She that can place her man well--

MOTHER

As you do, madam.

LIVIA

--As I shall, wench, can never lose her game...

Here's a duke

Will strike a sure stroke for the game anon;

Your pawn cannot come back to relieve itself. (2.2.294-302)

Bianca is no match for the Duke's indecent proposal just as Leantio's mother is no match for Livia over the board: "The Duke's cunning is paralleled with Livia's below, in any event, and his language is filled with the rhetoric of masculine power...which asserts a familiar pattern of masculine domination/female subjection as well as the more gender-neutral master/subject hierarchical relation. In such a context, Bianca's 'choice' is really non-existent" (Carroll *WBW*, xxiv).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the Duke and Livia are the superior gamesters because they understand how to take advantage of their opponent's position

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<sup>11</sup>In "Middleton's Chess Strategies in *Women Beware Women*" (1984), Neil Taylor and Bryan Loughrey argue that there are different ways of looking at the degree to which Bianca is responsible for her own seduction: "If Bianca is merely a white pawn being taken by a black rook, then this scene describes comparative weakness yielding to a superior social, physical, and economic strength. If she is regarded as a piece controlled by a chess player, this makes her utterly helpless in the hands of a manipulator from another realm. The third category regards her as a player outwitted by her opponent's guile, skill, and experience. The different categories provide different moral perspectives on her nature and behavior. By the terms of the third category, for example, she must be held to be a free, responsible soul engaged in a sinful act. The second category, on the other hand, absolves her. The first proposes a minimal degree of complicity in so far as pawns have the power to take rooks. But what is the identity of her opponent, of the player who moves her, of the rook that takes her. And is she really taken by a rook? Is she not taken by a king?" (Taylor and Loughrey 349). However, if Middleton wants his audience to question the extent to which Bianca is culpable for her own seduction, he also wants them to understand that her identities as both a woman and a pawn doubly compromise her ability to defend against the Duke's manoeuvres.

without compromising their own.

Middleton's use of an incidental chess scene and his handling of Renaissance gender issues makes *Women Beware Women* a natural precursor to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Indeed, in "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and *Women Beware Women*," Inga-Stina Ekeblad suggests that Brontë may have been drawing on Middleton's play and perceives a similarity between how both texts use chess "as a structural device for superimposing an ominous set of circumstances on an apparently ordinary and harmless one" (Ekeblad 450). Furthermore, like Brontë, Middleton was not averse to exploring contemporary critical debates, and this is evidenced in *Women Beware Women* by his handling of the contentious issues regarding a woman's place in society, as William C. Carroll remarks in his critical introduction to the play: "The play takes up several issues central to the contemporary women's controversy, especially the arranged or enforced marriage and the right of women to choose their husband" (xix).<sup>12</sup>

Although written ten years before *Women Beware Women*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* uses Prospero's revelation of Ferdinand and Miranda at chess not simply as an incidental chess scene or structural device to demonstrate that the lovers will be compatible or make an appropriate "King" and "Queen" when they return to Venice, but as a complex controlling metaphor for the relationships between different sets of

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<sup>12</sup>Carroll also provides the reader with the historical context in which Middleton wrote *Women Beware Women*: "The controversy in England over a woman's place became sharply focussed during the Reformation, as largely protestant ideas—of a woman's right to choose her own husband, of a woman's relative equality within marriage, or the possibility of divorce—came into widespread conflict with the medieval tradition. Queen Elizabeth's ascent to the throne (1558) and eventual political dominance added contradictory ingredients to the debate" (xviii).

characters in the play. The discovery scene's complexity in part derives from the fact that it suggests Prospero is the grandmaster of events on his island—educating his daughter to make her a worthy player and opponent for Ferdinand—while frustrating critical attempts to come to terms with what is happening in the game:

MIRANDA

Sweet Lord you play me false.

FERDINAND

No, my dearest love,  
I would not for the world.

MIRANDA

Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle,  
And I would call it fair play. (5.1.171-74)

Critics have glossed this scene in numerous ways, arguing that Miranda is playfully accusing her opponent of cheating, or that Ferdinand has just won, or that the game has ended in stalemate, without fully recognizing that Shakespeare's language makes it impossible for the reader to know precisely what is happening in the game. However, despite these conflicting critical judgments, the scene does suggest that Prospero has educated Miranda to be a careful and cautious player who, unlike her medieval chess playing counterparts, will not allow Ferdinand to win out of love without informing him of her own complicity in the bargain.

When Hardy makes a direct allusion to *The Tempest* in his novel by describing Elfride Swancourt as having a "Miranda-like curiosity," the critical reader is encouraged to make comparisons not simply between how these characters play chess against their male adversaries, but between how they are educated by their respective fathers in matters of social game-playing. Shakespeare's play therefore proves useful in discussing *A Pair*

of *Blue Eyes* because it suggests that the latter is devoid of a controlling patriarch who regulates things from outside the context of the various games that are played out before him; instead of such a figure, Hardy's novel has Christopher Swancourt, a character who does not recognize that he is a mere piece—a combination of bad bishop, feeble king, and underpromoted pawn—struggling for understanding from within a game that is largely controlled by the forces of fate and ironic coincidence.

Middleton's *A Game at Chess* represents a unique genre of dramatic literature—the allegorical chess-play—in which characters dressed as chess pieces satirize the social and political issues of the day. As T. H. Howard-Hill notes in his critical introduction to the play, Middleton's focus is on Anglo-Spanish relations, the various black and white pieces suggesting not only important players in the conflict, but their spiritual condition as well: "*A Game* is more powerful as a moral-religious allegory related loosely to contemporary political circumstances than as an allegorization of specific political events. 'Like the morality play, *A Game at Chess* is a didactic anatomization of evil formulated as a psychomachia, and like the political moralities, its primary concern is with affairs of state'" (43).<sup>13</sup> Howard-Hill further observes that while chess lends itself to moral, allegorical, and political interpretations, Middleton only uses chess so long as it suits his purposes: "The spectator's understanding should be prompted by the play rather than by his or her knowledge of chess...The spectators were not invited to play chess mentally as they watched. Chess is used not so much as a device to control the play's action as a sustained metaphor through which the allegory was elaborated" (36).

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<sup>13</sup>Howard-Hill is citing the critic Paul Yachnin.

That Middleton uses characters who are chess pieces suggests his play's affinity with Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, in which Alice finds herself playing chess amongst the kings and queens of the Looking-Glass chess board. Like Middleton's play, Carroll's work is replete with social and political commentary, and numerous scholars have attempted to link specific characters in both works with contemporary figures. However, Carroll uses the device of the chess problem to control the action of his narrative by devising a solution that is played out by the movements of the characters involved in the game. Middleton, on the other hand, is not interested in orchestrating a chess game, but instead concerned with the political implications of his chess pieces and the "polysemous" vocabulary of the game, which "enlarges rather than restricts the suggestiveness of the play's language" (Howard-Hill 35):

WHITE QUEEN

My, love, my hope, my dearest! O he's gone,  
 Ensnared, entrapped, surprised amongst the Black ones.  
 I never felt extremity like this;  
 Thick darkness dwells upon this hour, integrity  
 (Like one of heaven's bright luminaries now  
 By error's dullest element interposed)  
 Suffers a black eclipse. (4.5.1-7)

As this passage shows, Middleton is also conscious of the fact that there are two opposing sides in his play, and that although the black and white pieces do not play a game that conforms to the rules of chess, they are nevertheless involved in one with tremendous political implications: "*A Game at Chess* is rooted in a long-standing tradition of English fear over Spain's territorial ambitions but, most of all, an abhorrence of its active Catholicism which from the middle of the sixteenth century drew on English detestation of the Jesuits" (Howard-Hill 26). However, Carroll subverts traditional binary

oppositions to create a chess fiction that exceeds the inherent limitations of allegory. His game does not focus on the battle between good and evil chessmen--his pieces are White and Red rather than the traditional White and Black--but rather follows the progress of a curious mix of chess pieces, animals, and fantasy characters as they play a series of unorthodox games out of cosmic necessity rather than because of any political or spiritual motivation.

### 3. Why is Chess an Important Literary Metaphor?

The perception of an isomorphism between two known structures is a significant advance in knowledge--and I claim that it is such perceptions of isomorphism which create *meanings* in the minds of people.

--From Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach*

The reader has quite possibly arrived at this point meditating upon the question of why I have chosen to investigate the development of *chess* as a literary motif in the Victorian novel, and not some other parlour game like whist or draughts. After all, should we not simply agree with Edgar Allan Poe when he claims at the beginning of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" that in chess, "where the pieces have different and *bizarre* motions, with various and variable values, what is only complex is mistaken...for what is profound" (Poe 141)? The answer to this question, as numerous critics have subsequently recognized, is an unqualified no.<sup>14</sup> Apart from the consideration that both

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<sup>14</sup>Poe's argument is that draughts is the superior game for determining "the higher powers of the reflective intellect" (141) because the game is more often than not decided on the basis of pure skill alone: "In draughts...where the moves are *unique* and have but little variation, the probabilities of inadvertence are diminished, and the mere attention being left comparatively unemployed, what advantages are obtained by either party are obtained by superior *acumen*" (141). However, Poe does not consider that between sufficiently strong players, chess games are for the most part devoid of serious

as an intellectual contest and cultural metaphor, chess enjoys the richest tradition of any game, the very aspects of the game that Poe critiques set it apart from other competitive pastimes and make it singularly profound as an object of critical analysis.<sup>15</sup>

Because chess shares certain fundamental similarities with other formal systems, it can be juxtaposed with them to form what Douglas Hofstadter in *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (1979) defines as an *isomorphism*, a situation in which complex structures are shown to be mappable onto one another "in such a way that to each part of one structure there is a corresponding part in the other structure, where 'corresponding' means that the two parts play similar roles in their respective structures" (Hofstadter 49). Hofstadter argues that this act of interpretation forms the "lower level" of the isomorphism, and that "on a higher level, there is the correspondence between true statements and theorems" (50). The notion that isomorphic structures create meaning might seem to be nothing more than a rather complicated way of expressing the concept of metaphor, but it suggests that a deep understanding of the relationship between complex systems can produce meaning on previously inaccessible, and therefore unexplored, levels.

The reader's initial temptation is to speculate that because Brontë, Hardy, and Carroll each wrote a novel containing one or more chess games, they were making a statement about life being like a game of chess, which of course they were. However, these novelists all demonstrate an awareness to varying degrees that the metaphor "life

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miscalculations. Most often they are won as a result of the slow accumulation of positional advantages, a technique that owes itself not simply to superior powers of concentration, but to the skilful employment of one's creative imagination.

<sup>15</sup>Please see Appendix 3 for a discussion of those features of chess that make it unique among games and particularly receptive to metaphorical interpretation.

is a game of chess" is too limiting to sustain itself. In contrast, Medieval writers had no problem assigning each of the pieces in the game a corresponding real-life counterpart and thereby creating a simple isomorphism. For instance, a quick perusal of the *Innocent Morality* yields the following system of relationships:

chessboard	=	world
white	=	life
black	=	death
King	=	King
Queen	=	woman
Rook	=	judge
Knight	=	knight
Bishop	=	bishop
pawn	=	poor man

The obvious problem with such an isomorphism is that it restricts the relationship between chess and life to a series of one-to-one correspondences, which suggests that life is no more complicated than the game that allegorizes it. This was ideal for medieval writers who wanted to use their moralities to reinforce the importance of respecting social, political, and spiritual hierarchies, but in an age in which Darwin and others were demonstrating the fragility of traditional belief systems, such correspondences no longer made sense. Life could still be likened to a game, but the reason for playing it and the rewards or punishment that respectively awaited the winners and losers were now very much in doubt.<sup>16</sup>

Brontë, Hardy, and Carroll all recognized something that would have very much disconcerted medieval chess-morality writers: that life is less often like an orthodox chess

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<sup>16</sup>Of the three texts under investigation, Brontë's pre-Darwinian novel exhibits the least amount of doubt and provides the greatest sense of closure.

game and more often like an unfair, one-sided contest that does not offer the same chances to all of its players. The queen might be the most powerful piece on the board, but no matter what regard is given her, the game is still defined by what happens to the king. Therefore, while medieval writers used chess to symbolize the complex patriarchal order that defined humanity's place in the universe, the nineteenth-century texts under investigation used the game to show how difficult it was for Victorian women to overcome the restrictions of patriarchal order, even in a time of dynamic change.

Indeed, although the Victorian period saw significant progress for the feminist movement, this by no means meant that women were now recognized as having the same rights as men. It was almost impossible to get a divorce prior to 1857, and even when the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act permitted a husband to sue for divorce on the grounds of adultery, a woman had to prove that her husband was not only adulterous, but also either cruel, bigamous, incestuous, or perverse (Shanley 478). The Victorian period saw the beginnings of the crusade for Women's Suffrage, but when John Stuart Mill proposed an amendment to the Second Reform Act that would give the vote to women, it was defeated 196 to 73. Progress was made in the area of women's education, although it was not until 1868 that London University allowed women to sit for examinations; and even when the first group of women medical students was admitted to Edinburgh a year later, they were subsequently not permitted to finish those courses required for graduation. It was not until 1870 that women had the right to their own wages after marriage, although this did not include legacies over two hundred pounds, and it was not until 1882 that women had the right to any and all property earned or

acquired before or after their marriage. Before the Infant Custody Act of 1886, mothers were only permitted custody of their children when the husband died if he named them as guardian in his will.

Thus, it is not surprising that Brontë, Hardy, and Carroll used the chess metaphor to examine the difficulty their heroines face in negotiating the inequitable rule systems imposed upon them. In chess, the ability to make correct choices is paramount, and what the three works under investigation all carefully trace is how their central female characters find themselves in situations, or games, in which their ability to make important decisions is either seriously restricted or rendered impossible. Although Helen, Elfride, and Alice all believe that becoming a woman—whether literally through marriage, or in the latter’s case, symbolically by promoting to a Queen—represents the road to autonomy—where choices can be made freely—they eventually come to realize that the powers afforded them are significant only insofar as they allow them to see how trapped within the game they really are.

## CHAPTER 1

**"Women Beware Men":****Chess and Sexual Politics in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall***

Is it better to reveal the snares and pitfalls of life to the young and thoughtless traveller, or to cover them with branches and flowers? Oh, Reader! if there were less of this delicate concealment of facts—this whispering 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace, there would be less of sin and misery to the young of both sexes who are left to wring their bitter knowledge from experience.

—From the Preface to the Second Edition

Like the match between Livia and Leantio's mother in Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, the symbolically charged chess game between Helen Huntingdon and Walter Hargrave in Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* encourages readers to consider its implications as a metaphor for the traps and pitfalls that a woman must negotiate in a society controlled by men. However, while a significant body of criticism has examined Middleton's use of the chess scene in *Women Beware Women*, very little critical commentary has been devoted to examining the chess game in Brontë's novel. For the most part, existing criticism tends to fall into one of two categories: either the game is briefly mentioned, but a more extensive analysis of its implications for the text is not undertaken, or ideas are raised which are relevant to the chess motif, but no consideration is given to how the game informs these ideas.

The absence of scholarly analysis devoted to Brontë's chess motif in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is not surprising given the tradition of the novel's critical reception. In their efforts to reacquaint the reader with this neglected Victorian author, early critics felt the need to spend considerable energies in regurgitating biographical details, paraphrasing the plots of her novels, and explaining the differences between her approach to literature

and those taken by her sisters. Contemporary criticism has done much to redeem Anne's second novel, especially in recognizing both its feminism and narrative complexity—but it has yet to acknowledge how Brontë's chess motif is central to understanding two important concepts: the imbalance within the novel's male-female power relationships, and the heroine's difficulties in negotiating the inequitable rule systems that prevent her both from achieving autonomy and reacquiring the youthful optimism of her past.

Because of the integration of the parallel chess episodes in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and the complete synthesis of novel and chess game in *Through the Looking-Glass*, both of these works have at least enjoyed some critical appreciation for their respective chess metaphors.<sup>1</sup> However, Anne's desire not to cover "the snares and pitfalls of life...with branches and flowers" seems to have left critics in a quandary about how to connect her chess game with other parts of the novel. Brontë uses an incidental chess scene that occupies a relatively limited space in the novel and is not explicitly alluded to elsewhere, but the subtle inferences she makes concerning inequitable power distributions within domestic relationships are capable of suggesting to readers that the implications of the chess game can significantly illuminate the reader's interpretation of the text.

The only significant critical essay examining Brontë's use of chess in the novel is Inga-Stina Ekeblad's "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and Women Beware Women*"

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<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, Mary Rimmer's "Club Laws: Chess and the Construction of Gender in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*" (*The Sense of Sex: Feminist Perspectives on Hardy* [1993]: 203-220), and in the case of Carroll, Denis Crutch's "Lecture to the Lewis Carroll Society" (*Jabberwocky* [Summer, 1972]), Ivor Davies's "Looking-Glass Chess" (*The Anglo-Welsh Review* [Autumn, 1970]), and A. S. M. Dickins's "Alice in Fairyland" (*Jabberwocky* [Winter 1976]).

(1963).<sup>2</sup> In this brief article, Ekeblad makes a convincing argument that Brontë may be "consciously or subconsciously" mirroring the chess game played between Leantio's mother and Livia in *Women Beware Women* in order to use the game "as a structural device for superimposing an ominous set of circumstances on an apparently ordinary and harmless one" (450). Ekeblad argues that Brontë had access to the Heaton family library at Ponden House, which the records of an 1899 auction suggest contained Middleton's *Two New Playes* (1657), a work that included both *More Dissemblers Besides Women* and *Women Beware Women* (450). However, although Ekeblad recognizes the importance of double meanings in the verbal exchanges between Helen and Hargrave, and how "the chess-game itself gets a heavily symbolical significance" (450), she is not interested in exploring these things beyond anything more than a fairly superficial extent. By further investigating the relationship between *Women Beware Women* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, the critical reader gains valuable insight into how in Brontë's novel, chess is a metaphor for the sexual politics of Victorian society. Indeed, the game between Helen and Walter pointedly demonstrates how Brontë's heroine is forced to surmount overwhelming difficulties in dealing with unsolicited sexual aggression, and that in her

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<sup>2</sup>Critics tend to have very little to say about the chess motif. For instance, in *The Novels of Anne Brontë: A Study and Reappraisal* (1992), Arnold Craig Bell devotes a considerable portion of his book to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, only to remark about the chess game between Helen and Walter that it "is heavily symbolic" (112). In examining the scene immediately following the game, when Hargrave reveals the truth about Huntingdon's affair with Lady Lowborough, Bell makes the rather vague assertion that "the pawns and pieces in the game fall into place for the blind, deluded woman" (114). Bell's comments are suggestive, but his failure to elaborate leaves the reader in the position of having to question whether such correspondences can be so casually drawn without further investigation.

competing quests for personal happiness and her husband's spiritual redemption, Helen is obliged to work within a framework defined by the rules of socially ordained systems which privilege men.

A close analysis of the chess game played between Helen Huntingdon and Walter Hargrave suggests that its implications for Brontë's novel extend far beyond the limited context of the relationship between these two characters. Indeed, chess serves as a particularly appropriate metaphor for relationships in the novel because it represents a form of ordered warfare in which players are subject to strict rules regarding not only how they must conduct the affairs of the game, but just as importantly, how they must conduct themselves as players during the course of play. As Brontë recognized, however, men have a distinct advantage when it comes to marriage because they approach it from a socially ordained power position. Women, as Helen's aunt remarks in her initial lecture on marriage, are the ones who must be on guard "when the citadel of the heart is fairly besieged" (149). Brontë's novel explores what happens when the woman allows the enemy in, only to discover that her inability to cure the husband's rakish behaviour traps her within the very walls of the "citadel" which she has yielded to him.

The chess scene speaks to the larger issues of the novel by demonstrating that because Helen's position as a woman affects her ability to compete with men, it also affects her ability to control, and ultimately help, them. Helen's attempt to use the chess game as a means of defeating Hargrave on both an intellectual and sexual level is subverted by the progress of the game itself: first, she is ambushed and coerced into playing; second, she confronts an opponent who has absolute confidence, who shows a

greater affinity for cleverness and deception, and who believes that victory translates into evidence of potential sexual conquest;<sup>3</sup> last, she exhibits a misplaced confidence in her own abilities which allows her to be deceived (but fortunately not seduced). In addition, Helen's ability to understand the various games in which she is involved is undermined by her blindness to what is taking place at that moment between Huntingdon and Lady Lowborough.

In both *Women Beware Women* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, an ill-intentioned character uses chess in an effort to lure the heroine to her moral ruin. In Middleton's work, Livia uses her social position to influence Leantio's mother to play chess because she wants to manoeuvre the concealed Bianca into the waiting arms of the Duke of Florence. To accomplish her objective, Livia puts her guest in a position whereby to refuse the chess game could only be regarded as a serious violation of the rules of etiquette. After putting off Livia with a series of unconvincing excuses, Leantio's mother must finally give in to avoid insulting her obliging host:

LIVIA

Come, I'll not trust you; you use more excuses  
 To your kind friends than ever I knew any.  
 What business can you have, if you be sure  
 Y'have locked the doors? And that being all you have,  
 I know y'are careful on't. One afternoon  
 So much to spend here! Say I should entreat you now  
 To lie a night or two, or a week with me,  
 Or leave your own house for a month together--  
 It were a kindness that long neighbourhood  
 And friendship might well hope to prevail in.

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<sup>3</sup>Hargrave believes that checkmating Helen is an important symbolic precursor to their sexual mating, and thus for him, the game is not only a sublimation of his romantic desires but evidence that Helen must eventually yield to him.

Would you deny such a request? I'faith,  
Speak truth, and freely.

MOTHER

I were then uncivil, madam. (2.1.191-202)

Ultimately, such coercion convinces Leantio's mother that revealing Bianca's location is less important than protecting social relations with her neighbours, and thus it is by means of this guilt stratagem that Livia is able to draw Bianca into the Duke's trap. Similarly, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Helen has no real interest in playing chess against Hargrave, but he persists by making her seem petty if she refuses:

His eye met mine keenly, but steadily; there was something about him I did not understand, but he seemed sober enough. Not choosing to engage with him, I referred him to Milicent.

'She plays badly,' said he: 'I want to match my skill with yours. Come now!—you can't pretend you are reluctant to lay down your work—I know you never take it up except to pass an idle hour, when there is nothing better you can do.'

'But chess players are so unsociable,' I objected; 'they are no company for any but themselves.'

'There is no one here—but Milicent, and she—'

'Oh, I shall be delighted to watch you!' cried our mutual friend—

'Two *such* players—it will be quite a treat! I wonder which will conquer.'

I consented. (Brontë 308)

Hargrave's words closely parallel the argument that Livia devises in order to convince Leantio's mother to stay.

I'll keep you while I have you; you have great business sure,  
To sit alone at home; I wonder strangely  
What pleasure you take in't! Were't to me now,  
I should be ever at one neighbour's house  
Or other all day long. Having no charge,  
Or none to chide you, if you go, or stay,  
Who may live merrier, ay, or more at heart's ease?  
Come, we'll to chess, or draughts; there are an hundred tricks  
To drive out time till supper, never fear't wench. (2.1.181-89)

Whereas Leantio's mother is made to play so that she may avoid being seen as an uncivil guest, Helen is forced to consent so as not to appear an inconsiderate host. Although Hargrave's past behaviour has seen him squander considerable time in dissolute behaviour with Huntingdon and his ilk, he is bold enough to imply that Helen's refusal to play would be tantamount to *her* intentionally wasting time in order to slight him. Hargrave attempts to deflect Helen's attention from his hidden agenda by making her feel guilty, and in so doing, he accomplishes with far less effort what Livia does when she reprimands Leantio's mother:

And 'faith, let me entreat you, that henceforward  
 All such unkind faults may be swept from friendship,  
 Which does but dim the lustre. And think thus much,  
 It is a wrong to me, that have ability  
 To bid friends welcome, when you keep 'em from me;  
 You cannot set greater dishonour near me,  
 For bounty is the credit and the glory  
 Of those that have enough. I see y'are sorry,  
 And the good 'mends is made by't. (2.1.234-42)

If Helen begins the chess game at a disadvantage because she has been coerced into playing, this disadvantage is further compounded by her opponent's firm conviction that he will get the better of her. Like Middleton's Livia, Hargrave is as confident in his proficiency at chess as he is in his ability to work his hidden strategy on Helen, although his manner soon makes this strategy transparent:

'Now, Mrs. Huntingdon,' said Hargrave, as he arranged the men on the board, speaking distinctly, and with a peculiar emphasis, as if he had a double meaning to all his words, 'you are a good player,—but I am a better: we shall have a long game, and you will give me some trouble; but I can be as patient as you, and, in the end, I shall certainly win.' He fixed his eyes upon me with a glance I did not like—keen, crafty, bold, and almost impudent; already half triumphant in his anticipated success. 'I hope not, Mr. Hargrave!' returned I, with vehemence that must

have startled Milicent at least; but *he* only smiled and murmured,—  
 ‘Time will show.’ (309)

Hargrave’s “insolent self-confidence” disconcerts Helen because she considers the game “the type of a more serious contest” which she could not bear to lose: “I could ill endure that present success should add one title to his conscious power...or encourage, for a moment, his dream of future conquest” (309). Like Boarham and Wilmot before him, Hargrave represents the overconfident male whose romantic misconceptions Helen must endeavour to keep in perpetual check.<sup>4</sup> He tries to use his victory in the chess game to suggest his candidacy as Helen’s lover, and the manner in which he argues his case at various points in the novel resembles the attempts of Middleton’s Duke to convince

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<sup>4</sup>When Helen and Walter sit down to play chess, Milicent expresses her desire to see which of the two players will “conquer.” This choice of terms reminds the reader of the extent to which conversations between men and women in the novel are frequently couched in the language of military engagement. Earlier in the novel, Helen is forced to deal with the annoying attentions of Mr. Boarham, whose efforts to romance the heroine are characterized in terms of a siege: “Sullen silence was taken for rapt attention, and gave him greater room to talk; sharp answers were received as smart sallies of girlish vivacity, that only required an indulgent rebuke; and flat contradictions were but as oil to the flames, calling forth new strains of argument to support his dogmas, and bringing down upon me endless floods of reasoning to overwhelm me with conviction” (152). Mr. Boarham is not the only unwanted suitor from whom Helen seeks respite, for during a visit to Mr. Wilmot’s, she finds herself the unfortunate object of her host’s annoying affections: “so great was his confidence, either in his wealth or his remaining powers of attraction, and so firm his conviction of feminine weakness, that he thought himself warranted to return to the siege, which he did with renovated ardour, enkindled by the quantity of wine he had drunk” (162).

These episodes encourage us to consider how the rule systems under which Helen must negotiate her actions make it difficult for her to deal with the aggressive intentions of her suitors. It is not simply men like Boarham, Wilmot, and Hargrave who force Helen into “enemy territory,” but the rules which govern how she must play with them. Helen is not only subject to social laws that privilege males—the one, for instance, which makes her flight from Huntingdon with little Arthur illegal—but to patriarchal notions that designate a woman’s responsibility to be submissive and accommodating.

Bianca that she is likewise "beaten":

DUKE

Pish, strive not, sweet!  
 This strength were excellent employed in love, now,  
 But here 'tis spent amiss. Strive not to seek  
 Thy liberty and keep me still in prison.  
 I'faith, you shall not out till I'm released now;  
 We'll be both freed together, or stay still by't;  
 So is captivity pleasant...

Take warning, I beseech thee; thou seem'st to me  
 A creature so composed of gentleness  
 And delicate meekness, such as bless the faces  
 Of figures that are drawn from goddesses,  
 And makes art proud to look upon her work;  
 I should be sorry the least force should lay  
 An unkind touch upon thee.

BIANCA

My lord, what seek you?

Oh my extremity

DUKE

Love.

BIANCA

I have a husband.

'Tis gone already,

DUKE

Take a friend to him.

That's a single comfort;

BIANCA

Or else there's no religion. (2.1.327-49)<sup>5</sup>

That's a double mischief,

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<sup>5</sup>Note that Bianca here objects on moral grounds just as Helen does when she later informs Hargrave that she will not take a lover: "There is another life both for you and for me," said I. 'If it be the will of God that we should sow in tears now, it is only that we may reap in joy hereafter. It is His will that we should not injure others by the gratification of our own earthly passions; and you have a mother, and sisters, and friends, who would be seriously injured by your disgrace; and I too have friends, whose peace of mind shall never be sacrificed to my enjoyment--or yours either, with my consent--and if I were alone in the world, I have still my God and my religion, and I would sooner die than disgrace my calling and break my faith with Heaven to obtain a few brief years

Unfortunately for Helen, Hargrave's symbolic efforts to conquer her at chess later escalate into his own attempt to use the threat of physical force to impose his will: "I never saw a man so terribly excited. He precipitated himself towards me. I snatched up my palette-knife and held it against him. This startled him: he stood and gazed at me in astonishment; I dare say I looked as fierce and resolute as he. I moved to the bell and put my hand on the cord. This tamed him still more" (363). During the chess game, Helen (like Bianca) is at a distinct disadvantage because she is overcome with nervous anticipation while Hargrave (like the Duke) is "calm and fearless in the consciousness of superior skill" (309).<sup>6</sup> However, in this later episode, Middleton's rape scene appears to undergo an ironic reversal, with Hargrave deteriorating into violent instability and Helen seemingly in control, although such control is undermined by Helen's need to confront her assailant with the threat of calling for (of all people) Huntingdon, and by the latter's ignominious treatment of her when he and Hattersley come upon the scene.

The progress of the chess game itself is also telling, for although Hargrave's

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of false and fleeting happiness--happiness sure to end in misery, even here--for myself or any other!" (342).

'Helen's inability to concentrate because of her desire to see Hargrave lose manifests itself most tellingly when Hattersley stumbles in on their game:

'What keen gamesters you are!' said Mr. Hattersley, who had now entered, and been watching us for some time. 'Why, Mrs. Huntingdon, your hand trembles as if you had staked your all upon it! and Walter--you dog--you look as deep and cool as if you were certain of success,--and as keen and cruel as if you would drain her heart's blood!--But if I were you, I wouldn't beat her, for very fear: she'll hate you if you do--she will, by Heaven!--I see it in her eye.'

'Hold your tongue, will you?' said I--his talk distracted me, for I was driven to extremities. A few more moves and I was inextricably entangled in the snare of my antagonist. (310)

penchant for deception gives him complete assurance that he will defeat Helen over the board, his opponent nevertheless believes she can win: "For some time the combat was doubtful; at length, to my joy, the victory seemed inclining to my side: I had taken several of his best pieces, and manifestly baffled his projects. He put his hand to his brow and paused, in evident perplexity. I rejoiced in my advantage, but dared not glory in it yet" (309). Helen is able to prove to herself that she can resist Hargrave's indecent proposal, but she has a misplaced confidence in her ability to prove to him that she can not be so easily won.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, although Helen gains a victory in overcoming Hargrave's cunning ploy in not yielding to his sexual advances—accomplishing what Bianca was unable to do—she is nonetheless twice defeated, both in losing the chess game and in failing to inhibit her opponent's resolve. As in the case of Leantio's mother, these defeats are a direct result of her inability to see the consequences of the decisions she makes in the game.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>There is a definite analogy between how Helen fails in checking Hargrave's advances through the chess game and how she is unsuccessful in using art as a means of containing and controlling Huntingdon's character: "there is one face I am always trying to paint or to sketch, and always without success; and that vexes me. As for the owner of that face, I cannot get him out of my mind—and, indeed, I never try" (148). Indeed, just as Helen's ultimate loss to Hargrave does nothing but encourage his attentions, her portraits of Huntingdon only serve as the vehicle by which she herself initially gives up control to him. Later, when Hargrave tries to use the chess game as a similar means of revealing what he sees to be Helen's weakness for him, she has learned how to resist the implications of the metaphor, but at this early stage she can not avoid being manipulated: "'Go then, you vixen!' he said; but the instant he released my hand, he had the audacity to put his arm around my neck and kiss me. Trembling with anger and agitation—and I don't know what besides, I broke away, and got my candle and rushed upstairs to my room. He would not have done so but for that hateful picture!" (173).

<sup>8</sup>In the case of Leantio's mother, the problem is even more pronounced; she not only has a difficult time handling the chessmen, but she appears to be confused about which pieces even belong to her:

Furthermore, Hargrave is aware that Helen's marriage and her constant defence of Huntingdon provide evidence of her imprudent optimism, and it is this quality which he attempts to exploit during the chess game by means of a clever pawn sacrifice:

'Now, you think you will win, don't you.'

'I hope so,' replied I, taking his pawn that he had pushed into the way of my bishop with so careless an air that I thought it was an oversight, but was not generous enough, under the circumstances, to direct his attention to it, and too heedless, at the moment, to foresee the after-consequences of my move. (309)

Helen does not give her opponent enough credit; in thinking that Hargrave's move is an oversight rather than a sacrifice, she overlooks his ability to deceive her, just as she underestimates Huntingdon's powers of deception throughout much of the novel.<sup>9</sup>

LIVIA

...Nay, nay, the black king's mine

MOTHER

Cry you mercy, madam

LIVIA

And this my queen.

MOTHER

I see't now.

LIVIA

Here's a duke

Will strike a sure stroke for the game anon;  
Your pawn cannot come back to relieve itself. (2.1.296-302)

<sup>9</sup>During the chess game Helen keeps careful watch over Hargrave's general countenance, and at the precise moment he "put[s] his hand to his brow" and looks as though he is "in evident perplexity," she begins to feel confident in her ability to win. However, his body language appears to be nothing more than a clever trap, the same kind of trap that lured Helen into believing that Huntingdon was worth redeeming. The reader will recall that earlier in the novel, Helen boasts about the inherent skill she possesses as an amateur physiognomist: "I always judge of people's characters by their looks—not by whether they are handsome or ugly, but by the general cast of their countenance" (154).

The actual moves of the chess game symbolically comment on Hargrave's attempts to seduce Helen, for although there is nothing so explicit as a reference to a particular chess opening--as in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*--or a diagram that records the progress of the game--as in *Through the Looking-Glass*--there is nonetheless a brief description of the action that carries with it significant metaphorical implications:

'It is those bishops that trouble me,' said he, 'but the bold knight can overleap the reverend gentleman,' taking my last bishop with his knight;--'and now, those sacred persons once removed, I shall carry all before me.'

'Oh, Walter, how you talk!' cried Milicent--'She has far more pieces than you still.'

'I intend to give you some trouble yet,' said I; 'and perhaps, sir, you will find yourself checkmated before you are aware. Look to your queen.' (310)

Hargrave's use of his knight to capture Helen's bishop is loaded with double meanings. If we associate these pieces with the characters who wield them then the "bold knight... overleap[ing] the reverend gentleman" might symbolically suggest the triumph of sexual passion over moral fastidiousness.<sup>10</sup> However, the knight is a rather complex piece,

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Helen has previously been warned by her aunt not to have her heart deceived by her senses, but like an inexperienced chess player, she chooses to read potential opponents on the basis of their physical appearance rather than on any records of their previous "game-playing." Despite learning rumours of Huntingdon's wild ways, Helen can not "believe there is any harm in those laughing blue eyes" (154), and convinces herself that there is something in him for which it is worth redeeming the whole person. She ignores crucial pieces of evidence--Helen looks *at* her opponent rather than looking *into* him--and so compromises her position.

<sup>10</sup>Although Helen is able to resist Hargrave's advances, she is unable to prevent the other deceptive "knight," Huntingdon, from engaging in an adulterous liaison with Lady Lowborough. Indeed, Brontë demonstrates that one of the reasons Helen's marriage is so tragic is that she is constantly forced to confront overwhelming difficulties in trying to help the men around her become better human beings. She is eventually able to help Hattersley respect his wife, but only after a considerable length of time; she can not help Hargrave, and even when he finally resigns himself to a life without her, he does not

because although it serves as a metaphor for the chivalric hero, its deceptive movement also gives it sinister implications as a kind of nefarious interloper. Thus, on another level, the capture represents Hargrave's willingness to use deceit in attempting to undermine Helen's religious convictions about adultery.<sup>11</sup>

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think she is right; Huntingdon, of course, is beyond redemption and the strategies Helen employs to assist him in his moral improvement consistently backfire. For instance, when Huntingdon offends Helen by telling her the particulars of his intrigue with Lady F—, she adopts the strategy of shutting him out of their bedroom in an attempt to force him to apologize. However, while this appears to work for a time—Huntingdon is punished by being denied sex and his boasting is replaced with silent scorn—Helen's plan fails because although they ultimately reconcile, her actions have prompted him to make preparations for London. Huntingdon is so thoroughly disconcerting because he never makes concessions when it comes to taking Helen seriously, and so it is not surprising that her efforts to reform his behaviour are destined to fail. Although Helen appears to have different ways to go about correcting her husband's behaviour, she really has no defence against his conduct because neither speaking out nor keeping silent appear to have any effect on him.

<sup>11</sup>Throughout my critical investigation of the chess scene in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, I have often found myself speculating why Brontë did not develop her metaphor further by referring to the game in other parts of the novel. One reason is that Brontë was a moral realist, and that filling her novel with chess images might not have readily suggested itself. Another reason is that she may have seen the game as a natural extension of the military language she uses in characterizing the battles between the sexes. However, a final reason is suggested in her odd description of Hargrave capturing Helen's knight: perhaps Brontë was not entirely familiar with the finer points of the game. A closer examination of what Hargrave says as he makes his move suggests that Brontë may have been confused about the rules of chess. When Hargrave claims "It is those bishops that trouble me," he seems to be indicating that Helen's bishops are both still on the board. He then captures one of her bishops, not by putting his Knight on the square of the Bishop and removing the defending piece, but by "overleaping" it, as in a game of draughts: "the bold knight can overleap the reverend gentleman" (310). The reader now learns that this was Helen's remaining bishop, and that Hargrave's earlier statement about the "troubling bishops" must have been referring both to a bishop that had not yet been captured and to one that already had. Perhaps Brontë would not have been comfortable in taking advantage of the game's imagery in other parts of the novel if she was not completely sure about the rules of the game. In contrast, Hardy and Carroll were both very familiar with the game: in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Hardy makes reference not only to the Muzio Gambit, but to Morphy and Staunton, while Carroll was known to play chess, and even went so far as to design a travelling chess board.

Just as the chess game between Livia and Leantio's mother metaphorizes the Duke's seduction of Bianca, so does Brontë's chess game comment on Helen's failure to recognize Huntingdon's adulterous liaison with Lady Lowborough. In Middleton's play, Livia's comments not only clarify what has just taken place between the Duke and Bianca, but stress how Leantio's mother has been blind to the true nature of the game:

LIVIA

Did not I say my duke would fetch you over, widow?

MOTHER

I think you spoke in earnest when you said it, madam.

LIVIA

And my black king makes all the haste he can, too.

MOTHER

Well, madam, we may meet with him in time yet.

LIVIA

I have given thee blind mate twice.<sup>12</sup>

MOTHER

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<sup>12</sup>A blind mate occurs when a player gives checkmate but does not recognize it as such. Middleton plays with the idea of the blind mate in not having Leantio's mother see it, and in this way he comments on Livia's ability to render her opponent blind to the mating that takes place off stage (Carroll, *WBW* 50). In their article, "Middleton's Chess Strategies in *Women Beware Women*" (1984), Neil Taylor and Bryan Loughrey take issue with Paul Yachnin's "A Game at Chess and Chess Allegory" (1982) by arguing that Middleton is intentionally playing with the idea of the blind mate: "Yachnin protests that 'the proper technical meaning of a 'blind mate' contradicts the sense both of the scene as a whole and of the mother's answer' (p. 327). Having quoted Saul's definition...Yachnin is puzzled that the mother should be termed blind when the only perpetrator of a blind mate would have to be Livia. But Middleton not only understands this but takes the irony of blind mate a stage further. In *this* game the one who was mated is the blind one, unaware not only that she has been twice let off the hook by her opponent but, more importantly, unaware that Livia was *not* blind, knew what she was doing, and was doing it in order to prolong the game so that the Mother should be blind to the seduction taking place above" (Taylor and Loughrey 343-44).

You may see, madam,  
My eyes begin to fail.

LIVIA

I'll swear they do wench. (2.1.388-93)

Similarly in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Helen's loss to Hargrave comes as the result of her failing to recognize all of the implications of her opponent's moves. Like Leantio's mother, she is blind to the larger game being played in her absence, and thus chess serves as a metaphor not only for Helen's frequent inability to recognize the implications of Huntingdon's actions, but for her similar handicap in identifying him as an opponent.<sup>13</sup>

Brontë's use of parallelism reveals that the climax of the central narrative is Helen's awakening to the game that lies beneath the surface of the one she is playing. The events of the chapter entitled "Two Evenings" roughly repeat one another, with the chess game effectively bridging Helen's progress from naiveté to enlightenment. When she overhears Grimsby and Hattersley talking about Huntingdon's reformed behaviour at the beginning of the chapter, Helen can only recognize herself as the object of conversation, and when she surprises her husband in the shrubbery, his bizarre reaction is quickly assimilated into her mistaken view of their relationship:

I followed him thither, and found him just entering the shadowy walk. I was so light of heart, so overflowing with affection, that I sprang upon him and clasped him in my arms. This startling conduct had a singular

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<sup>13</sup>Although Huntington has given Helen ample proof that he is a scoundrel, she is nonetheless convinced that there is goodness in him. This appears to derive from the circumstances surrounding their first meeting, in which Huntingdon rescues Helen from the attentions of Mr. Boarham. Helen is confident that she can make accurate determinations about whether potential suitors have good or bad characters, but she miscalculates in not recognizing that her assessment of Arthur is essentially made on the basis of a comparison with a boring and overconfident geriatric.

effect upon him: first, he murmured, 'Bless you, darling!' and returned my close embrace with a fervour like old times, and *then* he started, and in a tone of absolute terror, exclaimed--

'Helen!--What the devil is this!' and I saw, by the faint light gleaming through the overshadowing tree, that he was positively pale with the shock.

How strange that the instinctive impulse of affection should come first, and then the shock of surprise! It shows, at least, that the affection is genuine: he is not sick of me yet. (305-6)

Just as Helen accepts the pawn sacrifice from Hargrave thinking that he has simply made an honest mistake, she interprets Huntingdon's suspicious response as proof of genuine affection. In the wake of this episode Helen enjoys a wonderful evening with her assembled company, not recognizing the secret that many of them have collectively managed to conceal from her.

The second of the two parallel days begins with Rachel's tearful warning about Huntingdon's infidelity, but Helen can only be alarmed (and not fully convinced) by what is suggested about Lady Lowborough because she has seen "nothing extraordinary in the conduct of either [Annabella or Arthur]--nothing calculated to excite suspicion, except in distrustful minds" (308). Thus she persists in believing that outward appearances can be sufficiently trusted, and that other kinds of evidence (i.e. gossip from the servants, previous flirtations, Huntingdon's stories about Lady F--) are not grounds for confrontation. In her chess match with Hargrave, Helen perceives his adulterous tactics as wholly transparent and therefore recognizes that his win does not translate into a sexual conquest of any sort. She may be "foolishly disconcerted" by her loss at chess, but she makes it clear that his victory has significance only within the context of the game itself:

Hargrave placed his hand on mine that rested on the table, and squeezing it with a firm but gentle pressure, murmured, 'Beaten--beaten!' and gazed

into my face with a look where exultation was blended with an expression of ardour and tenderness yet more insulting.

'No, *never*, Mr. Hargrave!' exclaimed I, quickly withdrawing my hand.

'Do you deny?' replied he, smilingly pointing to the board.

'No, no,' I answered, recollecting how strange my conduct must appear; 'you have beaten me in that game.'

'Will you try another, then?'

'No.'

'You acknowledge my superiority?'

'Yes--as a chess-player.' (310-11)<sup>4</sup>

However, because Helen misinterprets Huntingdon as a foolish rather than a deceptive player, she fails to recognize even the most blatant clues he leaves behind.

When Helen confirms Hargrave's accusations against Huntingdon by secreting herself in the shrubbery, she suddenly finds herself repeating her position of the previous night, only to discover that things have changed dramatically. Here, Helen comes to understand how she has subsisted in self-imposed ignorance and misinterpreted the importance of her place in Huntingdon's life:

'God help me now!' I murmured, sinking on my knees among the damp weeds and brushwood that surrounded me, and looking up at the moonlit sky, through the scant foliage above. It seemed all dark and quivering now to my darkened sight. My burning, bursting heart strove to pour forth its agony to God, but could not frame its anguish into prayers; until a gust of wind swept over me, which, while it scattered the dead leaves, like blighted hopes around, cooled my forehead, and seemed a little to revive my sinking frame. Then, while I lifted up my soul in speechless, earnest application, some heavenly influence seemed to strengthen me within: I breathed more freely; my vision cleared; I saw distinctly the pure moon shining on, and the light clouds skimming the

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<sup>4</sup>Throughout this brief dialogue, Brontë effectively draws on the tradition of the literary chess game as a forum for innuendo and double meaning. Hargrave's "'Beaten--beaten!'" and "'Will you try another, then?'" have as little to do with chess as what prompts him to play with Helen in the first place. However, for all of his manoeuvring, Hargrave misjudges Helen just as profoundly as she misjudges her own husband.

clear, dark sky; and then, I saw the eternal stars twinkling down upon me; I knew their God was mine, and He was strong to save and swift to hear. 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' seemed whispered from above their myriad orbs. No, no; I felt He would not leave me comfortless: in spite of earth and hell I should have strength for all my trials, and win a glorious rest at last!

Refreshed, invigorated if not composed, I rose and returned to the house. Much of my new-born strength and courage forsook me, I confess, as I entered it, and shut out the fresh wind and the glorious sky: everything I saw and heard seemed to sicken my heart. (313)

Helen perceives the first evening as "glorious" because she is overwhelmed by Huntingdon's apparent reformation, but her description of the second evening shows that discovering the adultery has not only allowed her to undergo a process of emotional and spiritual revelation, but awakened her to the complexity of circumstances she had previously taken for granted. Her awakening is not unlike that of Alice in *Through the Looking-Glass*: the discovery that being promoted from a pawn (a state of innocence) to a queen (one of experience) does not bring with it a liberation from the game, but only a greater recognition of how trapped within the game she really is: "How different was this from the evening of yesterday! *That*, it seems, was the last expiring flash of my life's happiness. Poor, blinded fool that I was, to be so happy!" (314). The metaphor of the game is certainly not out of place here, because once Helen discovers Huntingdon's adultery, their relationship seems to develop as a series of competitive contests.

Because Helen is subject to laws that forbid her to sue for divorce, her discovery of Huntingdon's infidelity unfortunately does not end her participation in their marriage. On the contrary, now that circumstances have allowed Helen to understand her true position, her existence becomes all the more difficult. Hargrave's advances remain a source of constant concern, but Helen's inability to hold out any real hope of marital

happiness forces her to be even more vigilant against the possibility of an emotional sneak attack: "His kindness may not all be feigned, but still, let not the purest impulse of gratitude to him induce me to forget myself; let me remember the game of chess, the expressions he used on the occasion, and those indescribable looks of his, that so justly roused my indignation, and I think I shall be safe enough. I have done well to record them so minutely" (319). Previously, Helen could avoid Hargrave's advances by taking solace in the fact that her efforts to reform Huntingdon might yet yield results, but now she is forced into using theoretical arguments centred on the importance of Christian morality, a difficult task even for someone with such strong religious convictions.

Helen's successful escape from Grass-dale Manor with Rachel and little Arthur appears to prove that she ultimately achieves a victory over Huntingdon, but the life she is forced to endure as the Mrs. Graham of Wildfell Hall reveals that her flight does not provide her with the kind of liberation she so desperately seeks. Although she no longer has to endure Hargrave's deceptive manoeuvring or her own husband's blatant adultery, Helen finds herself immersed in the difficult game of concealing both her identity and past from her new neighbours. Thus, if she can be said to be imprisoned by Huntingdon in both a literal and psychological sense at Grass-dale, here she is entangled in the web of lies, gossip, and suspicion perpetrated by the likes of Eliza Millward and the Wilson servants. As Fergus readily admits to her during a brief visit to the Hall, "some of us have nothing better to do than to talk about our neighbours' concerns, and we, indigenous plants of the soil, have known each other so long, and talked each other over so often, that we are quite sick of that game; so that a stranger coming amongst us makes an

invaluable addition to our exhausted sources of amusement" (83). Wildfell Hall may serve as a physical and emotional sanctuary for Helen, but it is also a kind of psychological prison, a haunting reminder of the shattered remains of her failed marriage with Huntingdon:

The close green walls of the privet, that had bordered the principal walk, were two thirds withered away, and the rest grown beyond all reasonable bounds; the old boxwood swan, that sat beside the scraper, had lost its neck and half its body; the castellated towers of laurel in the middle of the garden, the gigantic warrior that stood on one side of the gateway, and the lion that guarded the other, were sprouted into such fantastic shapes as resembled nothing either in heaven or earth, or in the waters under the earth; but, to my young imagination, they presented all of them a goblinish appearance, that harmonized well with the ghostly legends and dark traditions our old nurse had told us respecting the haunted hall and its departed occupants. (46)

Helen goes from being an outsider in her own marriage to an outsider in the community of --shire, and thus she becomes, as Fergus suggests, the object of the games played by those around her. Not surprisingly, she is unable to recognize Gilbert's love for her until he confesses it, let alone understand that he sees his attachment to her as a game that must be played with the utmost care:

I felt a new-born confidence in my powers of persuasion--a strong conviction that my own fervour of spirit would grant me eloquence--that my very determination--the absolute necessity for succeeding that I felt--must win me what I sought; while on the other, I feared to lose the ground I had already gained with so much toil and skill, and destroy all future hope with one rash effort, when time and patience might have won success, It was like setting my life upon the cast of a die; and yet I was ready to resolve upon the attempt. At any rate I would entreat the explanation she had half promised to give me before: I would demand the reason of this hateful barrier, this mysterious impediment to my happiness and, as I trusted, to her own. (120)

Thus, as in the chess game, Helen is "inextricably entangled in the snare[s] of [her]

antagonist[s]" (310). She is legally bound to Huntingdon, emotionally chained to Gilbert, and spiritually and psychologically entangled in guilt because of her position. Although her escape from Grass-dale is successful in the sense that her son is allowed to grow up in a protected environment, in other respects the move has only placed her in a more compromised and complicated position.

Helen's obedience to her patriarchal religious beliefs forces her to return to Grass-dale to nurse the sick and injured Huntingdon, and like the closing stages of a chess game, these chapters are characterized both by a weary repetition of moves and the gradual deterioration of Arthur's position. That Helen's powers seem increased in this phase of the novel is underscored by the fact that Huntingdon's friends and servants have all deserted him, and thus Helen alone remains as his sole defender, a position for which neither she nor anyone else is properly suited under the circumstances. For despite her genuine concern for Arthur's physical and spiritual well-being, Helen's powers as a caregiver can not overcome the fact that her husband seems determined to lose. Furthermore, Huntingdon's immobilization places a stress on Helen that proves crippling: "I am obliged to be a little stiff with him sometimes, or he would make a complete slave of me; and I know it would be unpardonable weakness to give up all other interests for him...but still, an unbroken night's rest is what I but seldom enjoy, and never can venture to reckon upon; for his wants or his fancies require my presence" (438). Thus, even though Helen now appears to have significant control over Huntingdon, she is still trapped by her fidelity to their original marriage contract.

An example of how Helen's augmented powers are undercut by her situation

manifests itself in the contract she forces Huntingdon to sign in order to see their son. Initially, it appears that she has complete command over the scene, conducting the reuniting of father and son in the manner of a simple business transaction: "I was determined my son's interest should not be forgotten; and having clearly written out the promise I wished Mr. Huntingdon to give upon a slip of paper, I deliberately read it over to him, and made him sign it in the presence of Rachel" (431). However, the contract itself is little more than a means to protect against the possibility that Huntingdon will forbid her to take little Arthur away again. As such, it symbolizes not how much control Helen has over her husband at this stage in their marriage, but how threatened she feels about a future in which he might seek to manipulate the rules of their social contract in order to exact some form of retribution upon her.

The repetition of similar manoeuvres which characterizes Helen's second stay at Grass-dale Manor has certain uncanny resemblances to Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, with the actions of Brontë's two central characters occasionally reminding us of the juxtaposition of the weary Clov and Hamm. Huntingdon is the immobile King who "hesitates to end," ordering Helen about less out of necessity than because this is his only means by which to exercise his male privilege: "'Mr. Hattersley sometimes offers his services instead of mine, but Arthur will not let me go: that strange whim still increases, as his strength declines--the fancy to have me always by his side. I hardly ever leave him, except to go into the next room, where I sometimes snatch an hour or so of sleep when he is quiet; but even then, the door is left ajar that he may know me to be within call" (447). But even if Beckett and Brontë approach literature from radically different

perspectives and with completely different ends in mind, both teach us about the misery of an endgame-like existence in which the players on either side are powerless to control the course of the game in which they find themselves. Despite his constant reprimands and threats to leave Hamm behind, Clov can do little more than cater to the needs of his blind tormentor, while Hamm is forced to rely utterly on services which Clov faithfully (but begrudgingly) renders him. Similarly, no amount of encouragement on Helen's part can convince her husband either to reform or to believe in the possibility of redemption, and Huntingdon's character forces him to rely on Helen to save him because he can not, and will not, save himself. In a profound sense, Helen and Arthur (like Clov and Hamm) are akin to players who want to escape the game in which they are involved but are still forced to play by the rules. Perhaps most importantly, the novel demonstrates that although Huntingdon's ruin does not prevent other characters from escaping the diabolical games in which they become immersed--Mr. Hattersley, for instance, is eventually able to see the error of mistreating his wife Milicent--his union with Helen unfairly makes her become an unwitting participant in a number of dangerous and emotionally destructive games.

Ultimately, the awakening that Helen experiences by discovering Huntingdon's infidelity in the wake of the chess game may appear to empower her--she lays down the law to Huntingdon, renegotiates their marriage contract in light of new evidence she has learned, and refuses to gratify his convictions about her jealousy by giving way to her emotions--but although this suggests that her new-found knowledge will transform her into a more enlightened, and therefore much improved player in the various contests that

Huntingdon instigates, it only reinforces how trapped Helen is within the unfair rules that both govern and define her existence. Helen is only released from her emotional prison because Huntingdon's profligacy results in his death, and even when she finds apparent happiness through her marriage to Gilbert Markham—a necessary conclusion for the work of a moral realist—her new husband's domination of the narrative voice in the closing stages of the novel effectively silences her.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Positional Sacrifice: Chess and Social Game-Playing in Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes*

Game, sport, art, science, passion, madness, recreation, obsession—chess is no one thing but all of these things: It is a world...Chess, like love, like music, has the power to let us see ourselves.

—Burt Hochburg

#### 1. A Critical Introduction to the Chess Motif

In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the chess games which Elfride Swancourt plays against Stephen Smith and Henry Knight serve as cogent prefaces to her relationships with these men. Elfride's profound confusion about whether to admire or admonish Stephen's lack of skill, and the tactical miscues which inform her chess games with the more experienced Knight, are replayed during the course of her failed romantic involvements. A close scrutiny of the parallel chess episodes in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* suggests that these matches are part of a larger conceptual scheme in which the patterns of chess take on a compelling presence in the narrative. Elfride, the chess-playing aspirant to polite society, is at the centre of a game contested for the stakes of social power against the backdrop of Hardy's chequered landscape.<sup>1</sup> In this game she assumes roles as both the principal

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<sup>1</sup>In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Hardy frequently paints the landscape in chequered tones. When the reader is first introduced to Stephen Smith on his way to Endelstow rectory, the scene of the dusk "thickening" into darkness is captured in the depiction of Lord Luxellian's mansion as a transforming chessboard: "The windows, which had before been as black blots on a lighter expanse of wall, became illuminated, and were transfigured to squares of light on the general dark body of the night landscape as it absorbed the outlines of the edifice into its gloomy monochrome" (15). The image is particularly provocative because it comes in the wake of our learning from Robert Lickpan about Hedger Luxellian's promotion to a lord at the hands of the mysterious King Charles III. In this early scene, Hardy introduces several images that are suggestive of pieces littering the chessboard landscape: the silhouettes of Robert and Stephen travelling "along the

player and quintessential plaything, the engineer of subtle combinations and positional sacrifices, and the overprotected but isolated piece striving to find its place on the field of social combat. Elfride's approach to the game is informed by a controlling father who tries to teach her the importance of playing for position. However, the social power she craves lies not in the get-rich-quick schemes of her pretentious teacher or his desperate forays into the realm of privilege, but in a liberation from such concerns through the ability to play not simply for the slow accumulation of positional advantages, but for a mate, with all the implications that this expression connotes.

Elfride is forced to learn the rules of social game playing from Swancourt, who painstakingly leads his daughter through every phase, from the importance of book knowledge in the opening stages to the principles of playing for position and eventually, to conducting an endgame whenever necessary. However, since Elfride and her father play for radically different stakes, she can only confound his game and therefore, ultimately, her own. In portraying a world where Fate thwarts the carefully planned moves of his characters, Hardy explores what happens when an individual's bid for liberation ultimately traps her within the very combination she plays to free herself.

Although the novel's chess episodes have value as allegorical constructs, the motif

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whole dreary distance of open country" (11), in the manner of hanging pawns; the Rook-like twin lighthouses "reposing on the horizon with a calm lustre of benignity" (15); and the Endelstow rectory, representative of the resident "bishop" and built on the sight of an old quarry, suggesting its replacement of a piece now lost. These kinds of images reappear throughout the novel, especially with the depiction of chequered patterns formed by the sharp contrasts between light and dark, as in the scene where Henry, Stephen, and Elfride meet in the Luxellian tomb: "The blackened coffins were now revealed more clearly than at first, the whitened walls and arches throwing them forward in strong relief" (255).

manages to exceed these limitations in revealing to the reader how Hardy's universe operates as its own evolving game environment. The author not only explores the symmetry and ordered logic that many earlier writers perceived as the essence of the chess game, but further exploits its intricacy and complexity. In so doing, he presents an unfolding fictional gameworld replete with conflicts and cross-purposed goals that chess in its complexity has the capacity to illuminate, but in its ordered logic ultimately lacks the power to replace.

Although a significant amount of criticism has been written about *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, very little has been said about the novel's parallel chess episodes. Several critics have acknowledged how the chess games function as a literary device in the novel, mirroring Elfride's romantic involvements with Stephen and Henry, but they have seldom pursued any deeper investigation of how the game takes on a metaphorical presence in the narrative as a whole. In *Character and Environment in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (1925), Herbert B. Grimsditch summarizes the position that a number of critics have taken in analyzing the novel's chess metaphor, which is to say that he takes no particular position at all: "The two games of chess may serve as pointers to the state of affairs between Elfride and the two men. When she plays against Smith she is superior and endeavours to let him win, but in the game with Knight it is he who is the more expert, and who at first tries to follow this patronising procedure" (111). This is where Grimsditch begins and ends his discussion of chess, and though there can be no real objection to what he says, his comments amount to nothing more than what a cursory reading of the text would suggest.

In *The Neglected Hardy: Thomas Hardy's Lesser Novels* (1982), Richard H. Taylor sees the chess games as part of Hardy's "striking exercise in modulated parallelism, which lends a plausible resonance to the author's ironic vision and anticipates the system of balancing and recurrent motifs in Hardy's later novels" (36). His investigation of the motif, however, goes little beyond previous scholarship:

The chess scenes are both analogous and symbolic. In the first Elfride has the upper hand over the inexperienced Stephen and sympathetically allows him to win, a gesture much resented on its discovery. In the second the situation is ironically reversed: Knight now has command over Elfride, causing her to be neurotically distressed ('O, the difference between Elfride's condition of mind now, and when she purposely made blunders that Stephen Smith might win!') and 'full of mortification at being beaten'. Now Knight exercises a patronising charity, to which she reacts as violently as Stephen had to hers. The traditional sexual symbolism of the game is implicit, and these episodes point the change in Elfride's fortunes. (36-37)

However, the chess motif is capable of illuminating a significant issue that Taylor raises in his essay, namely, the novel's controversial conclusion. Taylor has some difficulty with Elfride's untimely demise, arguing that "[t]he tragic *dénouement*, Elfride's death, seems incongruous after the comic description of Smith and Knight on their embarrassed train journey to Elfride's home. That Elfride and her coffin have shared their journey to Camelton seems calculated to give an ironic shock, but the narrative verges on black comedy" (Taylor 35). However, while he also recognizes that critics are wrong to argue that the ending is entirely unprepared for, he misses the opportunity to show how Elfride's premature death is consistent with the metaphorical presence of chess in the novel, since queens are often captured or lost before the end of a game.

Pamela Jekel is perhaps the first critic to spend more than a couple of sentences

in discussing the novel's parallel chess episodes. In *Thomas Hardy's Heroines: A Chorus of Priorities* (1986), she argues that Elfride's game with Knight is "a prelude to the swordplay of Sergeant Troy in *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874), and [that] Bathsheba's obsession with her soldier is similar to Elfride's for Knight" (58). Not only does Jekel recognize the implicit sexuality of the chess game, but shows how it is underscored by Elfride's reaction to it when she is bested by Knight: "Elfride was lying full-dressed on the bed, her face hot and red, her arms thrown abroad. At intervals of a minute, she tossed restlessly from side to side, and indistinctly moaned words used in the game of chess" (qtd in Jekel 49). However, once Jekel ends her discussion of the chess motif she puts it out of mind and does not use it to address some of the arguments she raises later in her article. For instance, she observes that Hardy's world punishes those who "strive for control" and rewards those who have a "resigned acceptance," but without acknowledging the implications of this in the context of a game environment: "Those characters who work passionately towards goals seldom achieve them. Those who, instead, take bits of happiness from whatever life hands them are often able to warm themselves against a small fire of contentment, however feeble" (51). Swancourt and Knight are fated to be unhappy because each of them tries to control his affairs from a position that lacks objectivity. They attempt to regulate the game from within, which is impossible as Hardy well understood, because they always lack important pieces of information. However, Elfride is also destined to fail in her bid for liberation because her education in social game-playing has confusingly taught her both to strive for control and to relinquish it, a process which wears her down throughout the course of the novel

and brings about her premature death. Jekel is consistent with earlier critics in not connecting this feature of Hardy's plot with the fact that the queen is ultimately an expendable piece in the chess game.

The most comprehensive analysis of Hardy's chess motif can be found in Mary Rimmer's "Club Laws: Chess and the Construction of Gender in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*" (1993). Rimmer not only recognizes that the parallel chess episodes "structure, develop, and symbolize the currents of social and sexual dominance that define Elfride's relations with her two suitors" (205), but also acknowledges the game's more subtle implications for Hardy's novel, such as the relationship between Elfride and the expendable queen piece, and the game of interpretation between the author and his readers. One of Rimmer's arguments is that Elfride has a certain degree of autonomy in the early part of the story and that her chess matches chart its decline: "In the early chapters of the novel she has considerable autonomy and without consciously rebelling violates many of the decorums of femininity. She rides her horse bareheaded, unattended and recklessly through the countryside, and exploits her unladylike equestrian habits to elope with Stephen, the distinctly ineligible son of the local stonemason" (208). However, my interpretation of Hardy's chess motif proposes that Elfride only has a very superficial autonomy, and that because she learns the rules of social game-playing from her father—an incompetent teacher who only serves to confuse his pupil—she is forced to play out her relationships with Stephen and Henry like a novice chess player struggling to negotiate the tangled web of choices and decisions on a chessboard.

## 2. How Elfride Learns the Game

### 2.1. Elfride's Instructor is No Grandmaster (And No Magician Either...)

The manner in which Elfride is taught the art of social game playing by her father is more richly understood in light of an intertextual connection that the text establishes with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. At the novel's outset, the narrator makes an overt allusion to the play by drawing a comparison between Elfride's first encounter with Stephen and Miranda's discovery of Ferdinand: "The point in Elfride's life at which a deeper current may be said to have permanently set in was one winter afternoon when she found herself standing, in the character of a hostess, face to face with a man she had never seen before—moreover, looking at him with a Miranda-like curiosity and interest that she had never yet bestowed on any mortal" (8). A more subtle allusion takes place a bit further on when Swancourt's complaint to Stephen of existing in "absolute solitude" (21) is greeted by the young architect with what appears to be another reference to the play: "'You have your studies, your books, and your--daughter'" (21). Like Shakespeare's Prospero, Swancourt has a profound sense of his own isolation, not in being segregated from the rest of humanity, but from those whom he considers his social equals. Furthermore, his demonstrated faith in Hewby's letter and Burke's *Peerage* recalls Prospero's obsession with his magic tomes. At the same time, however, Swancourt is much more a comic figure than Shakespeare's reclusive mage, his penchant for scheming not unlike that of Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban, who bumblingly plot against Prospero. Indeed, by drawing a correlation between *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *The Tempest*—works in which chess takes on an often subtle but important metaphorical

presence—Hardy examines what happens when a conspicuously fallible patriarch is responsible for the education in social game-playing of a strong-willed and rather unpredictable daughter.

Although a critical juxtaposition of Swancourt and Prospero provides a clear sketch of the former's pronounced fallibility in the matter of his daughter's education, Hardy evidently recognizes that these characters have some peculiar similarities. Both endure a form of segregation: Prospero isolates himself from his dukedom and is in turn banished into physical isolation by Antonio, while Swancourt sees himself as inheriting a position that isolates him from those he would be friends with and necessitates a self-imposed isolation from those who would be friends with him. Both men yearn for the position they have lost: Prospero has been stripped of his Dukedom by heedlessly immersing himself in his arcane studies, while Swancourt sees himself as the product of a noble family that has systematically relinquished its former prestige through unfortunate circumstances and eccentric overindulgence. Both men pursue a course to regain what they consider to be rightfully theirs: Prospero orchestrates the shipwreck of his enemies to bring them under his control, and encourages the relationship between Ferdinand and Miranda that will bring his daughter to the throne of Naples, while Swancourt seizes upon Mrs. Troyton in a marriage designed essentially to bring her wealth under his control, and quietly encourages Elfride's relationships with men who, he believes, are of a respectable social class.

But in suggesting these affinities to the reader, Hardy's novel also recognizes that they serve as the starting point for a critical investigation into the very real differences

between how Swancourt and Prospero play chess on a human scale for the stakes of social power, and how they instruct their daughters to this end. Although Prospero is forced to endure physical isolation from his dukedom through his brother's duplicitous dealings, he acknowledges some responsibility for his own banishment because of his immersion in private studies and his willingness to leave the affairs of state to Antonio: "The government I cast upon my brother / And to my state grew stranger, being transported / And rapt in secret studies" (1.2.75-77). Prospero's admission demonstrates an awareness that his banishment is the product of a previous self-imposed isolation. This knowledge empowers him to assume responsibility for righting not only his sufferings at the hands of Antonio and Alonso, but what his neglect has brought upon Miranda, "his only heir / And princess" (1.2.58-59). In contrast, Swancourt seems to have an acute awareness that his social isolation is the product of those who have gone before him: an inherited condition that must be both vigorously prevented from further decline and systematically improved. Swancourt does not seem to recognize, or perhaps does not relish admitting, that the various get-rich-quick schemes in which he has previously invested capital have considerably diminished his fortune. Unlike Prospero, who recognizes that eccentricity and neglect have cost him in the past, Swancourt recklessly schemes in the name of familial duty. This is evident in his eager but veiled description of the plan to get control of his future wife's finances:

'Elfride,' said her father with rough friendliness, 'I have an excellent scheme on hand, which I cannot tell you of now. A scheme to benefit you and me. It has been thrust upon me for some little time--yes, thrust upon me--but I didn't dream of its value till this afternoon, when the revelation came. I should be most unwise to refuse to entertain it.

'I don't like that word,' she returned wearily. 'You have lost so

much already by schemes.' (86)

Coupled with his failing to acknowledge the dangers associated with his own scheming, his tendency to assign blame places a great deal of stress on his relationship with Elfride because she not only serves as a symbol of his own isolation, but carries with her the potential for immortalizing him in the sacred annals of genealogical history as the one who irreparably humiliated the Swancourt name.

But although Swancourt's numerous misgivings can neither be dismissed nor ignored, Hardy's allusion to *The Tempest* is crucial in helping the reader to recognize that Elfride's father is bereft of those powers to which Prospero has been granted access. Indeed, the latter is as much the grandmaster of events on his sheltered isle as Swancourt is a piece struggling for understanding from within Hardy's game universe. Critics have traditionally recognized that Prospero is in many ways the character of Shakespeare himself, taking the stage in his final play to comment on the relationship between nature and art, and on the artistic process. In contrast, Swancourt, like each of the characters in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, is little more than an isolated piece on the cosmic chessboard, controlled to a certain extent by the hand of Fate.

Shakespeare's scene depicting Miranda and Ferdinand at chess carries with it the implication that his characters are players as well as pieces, but Hardy explores what happens when pieces—deprived of a beneficent controlling presence to correct mistakes and maintain order—attempt to control the game from within as a player would from without. Indeed, Hardy shows us that the reason Swancourt is a *patzer* when it comes

to social game playing is in no small part because of this very limitation.<sup>2</sup> In some ways, Swancourt is no more in control of things than Caliban; like Shakespeare's character, he greedily takes to those who can assist him out of his current predicament. When Swancourt meets Stephen for the first time and tries to make him into something he is not, his actions are not unlike those of Caliban when the latter deifies Stephano upon their first meeting:

Caliban       Hast thou not dropped from heaven?  
 Stephano      Out o'th'moon, I do assure thee. I was the  
                   Man i'th'moon when time was.  
 Caliban       I have seen thee in her, and I do adore thee. (2.2.134-37)

One of the problems that plagues Swancourt's ambitious attempts to control the progress of the "game" is his inability--and fundamental disinclination--to be present at important moments in the novel. There is little question that the absence or presence of the father figure as patriarchal overseer provides a telling contrast between the parallel chess matches in Hardy's novel and the chess scene in Shakespeare's play. Prospero reveals the lovers to Alonso and the others, and is present when Miranda initiates what appears to be a playful accusation of duplicity directed at Ferdinand:

Miranda      Sweet Lord, you play me false.  
 Ferdinand                                    No my dearest love,  
                   I would not for the world.  
 Miranda      Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle,  
                   And I would call it fair play. (5.1.171-74)

Prospero has previously warned Ferdinand about the importance of Miranda's chastity

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<sup>2</sup>Brace defines the term "patzer" as "slang for an extremely weak player. The term is derived from the German verb *patzen* meaning to carry out badly or to blunder" (Brace 212). The term is commonly used to refer to anyone whose chess skills are considerably weaker than the person using the expression.

and thus makes himself present at this moment when the pair is engaged in a game replete with sublimated sexuality.<sup>3</sup> Prospero recognizes Miranda's vulnerability in light of the traditional notion that women at chess are susceptible to the romantic advances of their male counterparts. His presence during this scene serves as one of the many examples of his controlling presence throughout the play.

Swancourt, on the other hand, is absent during critical moments of his daughter's chess encounters. During her games with Stephen he is initially present, but being so preoccupied with his own, as yet unrevealed, affairs concerning Mrs. Troyton, he is unaware that Elfride is letting her opponent win out of pity: "Mr. Swancourt was sitting with his eyes fixed on the board, but apparently thinking of other things" (51). When the moment comes for Stephen's realization that Elfride has been letting him win, the narrator remarks that Swancourt has "left the room" (53). He is not present to prevent Stephen's passionate admission of love for Elfride, an admission that is brought about by competitive tension and the recognition of being the object of another person's play: "'Ah, you are cleverer than I. You can do everything—I can do nothing! O Miss Swancourt!' he burst out wildly, his heart swelling in this throat, 'I must tell you how I love you! All these months of my absence I have worshipped you'" (54). The sublimated hostility and sexual symbolism that chess embodies, with its eradication of enemy forces climaxing in "mate," is not tempered here by the presence of a controlling

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<sup>3</sup>Prospero has warned Ferdinand of the penalty for consummating his relationship with Miranda too soon in terms that are unequivocal: "No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall / To make this contract grow; but barren hate, / Sour-eyed disdain, and discord shall bestrew / The union of your bed with weeds so loathly / That you shall hate it both" (4.1.15-22).

father-figure.

The same is true of Elfride's match with Knight. Swancourt is present when the two decide to play and boasts that Elfride "plays very well for a lady" (163), but he once again fails to see the significance of his daughter playing chess against a male visitor:

Mr. Swancourt had forgotten a similar performance with Stephen Smith the year before. Elfride had not; but she had begun to take for her maxim the undoubted truth that the necessity of continuing faithful to Stephen, without suspicion, dictated a fickle behaviour almost as imperatively as fickleness itself; a fact, however, which would give a startling advantage to the latter quality should it ever appear. (163)

Swancourt does not stay to watch the succession of games and indeed is not heard from again until the next morning. As such, he is unable to control his daughter's growing anxiety over the series of defeats she suffers against Knight, defeats which cause her to be both increasingly attracted to, and repulsed by, her opponent. Swancourt is also not present for Elfride's final game with Knight, during which she feels so humiliated that she is forced to leave the room. He scolds his daughter for slavishly playing so soon after her troubled sleep was filled with "armies of bishops and knights" (166), but he is ineffective in dissuading her.

Just as Prospero's presence during the discovery of Ferdinand and Miranda at chess reinforces his controlling presence throughout the course of the play, Swancourt's absence during Elfride's matches with Stephen and Henry accentuates his recurring absence throughout the novel. After Stephen leaves in humiliation, Swancourt tells Elfride that he recognized the possibility of her romantic attachment with Stephen, but in so admitting demonstrates a fundamental lack of interest in his daughter's emotional well-being: "I know—since you press me so—I know I did guess some childish

attachment might arise between you; I own I did not take much trouble to prevent it; but I have not particularly countenanced it" (82). Swancourt's attempt at absolution rings hollow in that he accepts no responsibility for circumstances perpetrated largely by his equivocating silence.

Apart from his disappearance during Elfride's chess matches, Swancourt is physically absent at other key moments. His journey to Stratleigh to be married allows Elfride the opportunity to run off with Stephen to London. Similarly, his absence upon her return—he only travels as far as Wadcombe and returns the following day—prevents him from discovering Elfride's deception. The reader is aware that such a discovery could well result in Elfride's marriage with Stephen to prevent scandal, since in an earlier conversation with his daughter Swancourt is forced to admit: "'If he were allied to us irretrievably, of course I, or any sensible man, should accept conditions that could not be altered; certainly not be hopelessly melancholy about it. I don't believe anything in the world would make me hopelessly melancholy. And don't let anything make you so, either'" (106). Once again, Swancourt demonstrates his emotional distance from Elfride—an acute lack of understanding as it concerns her reckless intentions—as if their discussion about her hypothetical marriage to Stephen could not have any ramifications.

Hardy's allusion to *The Tempest* juxtaposes a series of binary oppositions—fate and will, presence and absence, denial and accountability, player and plaything—in suggesting how Swancourt, an exceedingly fallible Prospero, educates his daughter, a dutiful but free-spirited Miranda, in a chessic class game played for the stakes of social power. In making these connections with Shakespeare's play, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* suggests both the

limitations of its characters in their ability to negotiate the fictional gameworld of the text as well as the richness of their inherent complexity in being so limited. Swancourt does not have the means to work magic when it comes to teaching his daughter the art of social game playing; rather, his own tendencies to conceal, manipulate, misinterpret, and scheme teach Elfride that he is not to be trusted with her confidence and that she herself must use the same kind of deception that ultimately checkmates her.

## 2.2. Elfride is Inadequately Informed of the Rules

Swancourt's initial miscalculation in educating Elfride is his use of unsuitable texts to instruct her in the art of social game playing. He oversimplifies the game in assuming that success ultimately derives from handling a complicated situation as though it has an uncomplicated solution, and then attempts to impart this knowledge to his daughter by teaching her moves without properly explaining the principles behind them. Indeed, a consideration of Swancourt's conduct in light of the novel's prevailing chess motif suggests that his correspondence with Hewby and the genealogical contents of Burke's *Peerage* prove to be dangerously unreliable rule books for instructing Elfride about how to negotiate the novel's complex gameboard.

As a seasoned social player, Swancourt makes clear to his young protegee his firm belief that the ability to deal with unfavourable situations can only be accomplished if one learns the art of social game playing from the proper texts. Swancourt holds Elfride's novels responsible for the threat they pose to her development as a player, and when he complains that she "gets all kinds of stuff" (9) into her head from reading these romances, he is objecting to the fact that this sort of literature threatens to leave her with

an inappropriate strategy for dealing with real-life situations. In a sense, Swancourt sees the novel as a set of unreliable instructions: a guide to playing a fictional game.

One of the misconceptions that Swancourt surely suspects Elfride of having formed from her steady diet of romance novels is that Hewby's assistant will not come because of the inclement weather, and he is quick to inform her that such logic is nonsensical: "Wind! What ideas you have Elfride! Who ever heard of wind stopping a man from doing his business" (8-9). Swancourt recognizes a danger in letting such preconceptions go unchecked because they threaten to expose his pupil as an unprepared player while at the same time drawing attention to her instructor's incompetence. Thus, he corrects her on a number of points, not only on the ridiculousness of assuming that the weather will prevent their guest from arriving, but on what sort of meal to serve Hewby's assistant (Elfride apparently gets it wrong twice), and on how a young woman should conduct herself in the presence of a visitor—Elfride claims to be uncomfortable engaging in conversation with someone to whom she has not been formally introduced, which her father finds ludicrous in light of his conviction that anyone travelling such a great distance will "hardly be inclined to talk and air courtesies" (9) Naturally, his conviction is altogether fallacious as Stephen proves to be more than inclined.

Swancourt tells his daughter to read the correspondence between himself and Hewby to learn more about their impending visitor because such information—unlike the matter contained in her "contemptible" novels—is likely to give Elfride a good indication about how to receive their guest. Like a chess player who prizes the texts from which he derives an opening repertoire, Swancourt treats the letters as a collective treatise on

the theory of how to begin a game of social exchange, and he tells Elfride that if she wants to learn more about the nature of their visitor, she can consult the account of the moves that have been played to this point. Not surprisingly, when Elfride admits to having previously read over the letters, Swancourt quickly replies: "‘Well, what’s the use of asking questions, then? They contain all I know’" (9).

Unlike Elfride and her suitors who face off directly against one another in over-the-board play, Swancourt and Hewby are engaged in a game of social correspondence in which the letters act as a record of the moves that have been played to this point. However, a correspondence game involves adversaries who examine their positions without the benefit of sharing a board, and who must further rely on interpreting each other’s notation for recording their moves. Unfortunately, Swancourt is not inquisitive enough about the implications of Hewby’s use of the term "assistant" to describe Stephen; instead, he defines the term himself to mean "partner" and even in retrospect accepts this as the only logical interpretation:

‘Here’s what he said to me: "Dear Sir, Agreeably to your request of the 18th instant, I have arranged to survey and make drawings," et caetera. "My assistant, Mr. Stephen Smith"--assistant, you see he called him, and naturally I understood him to mean a sort of partner. Why didn’t he say "clerk"?’

‘They never call them clerks in that profession, because they do not write. Stephen--Mr. Smith--told me so. So that Mr. Hewby simply used the accepted word.’

‘Let me speak, please, Elfride! "My assistant, Mr. Stephen Smith, will leave London by the early train to-morrow morning...*many thanks for your proposal to accommodate him...you may put every confidence in him,* and may rely on his discernment in the matter of church architecture." Well, I repeat that Hewby ought to be ashamed of himself for making so

much of a poor lad of that sort.’ (85)<sup>4</sup>

Swancourt errs in his interpretation because of his own peculiar brand of egotistical logic: he assumes that Hewby’s priorities are identical with his own, and that the architect would naturally make class consciousness a higher priority than professional considerations. Thus, he misinterprets the game of correspondence with Hewby in assuming that Stephen is the sort of person whom he would want dealing with his family on a social level, and falls victim to the very kind of opening trap from which he is striving to protect his daughter. Swancourt is prone to such traps because of his tendency to interpret situations in which he interacts with “gentlemen” as necessarily favourable to his family’s fortunes. Because he acutely recognizes his own isolation, he greedily takes to any individual who might potentially liberate him from his social stalemate.

The book in which Swancourt places absolute trust regarding the high stakes game of social advancement is John Burke’s *A Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Landed Gentry of Great Britain and Ireland*. Here, Swancourt traces his own ancestral history and justifies his position as a blue-blooded social player. When Stephen comes to Endelstow for the first time, Swancourt is quick to establish his guest’s ties to “a well-known ancient country family—not ordinary Smiths in the least” (20). Stephen protests, but Swancourt’s fidelity to his own self-aggrandizing assumptions easily win out over his guest’s puzzled objections:

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<sup>4</sup>An example of the confusion that can arise in a game played by correspondence is humorously illustrated in Woody Allen’s “The Gossage—Vardebedian Papers.” In this epistolary short story, the two combatants become so acutely embroiled in a controversy over the position of the pieces that they end up playing separate games. This is precisely what Swancourt does in refusing to acknowledge his misinterpretation of Hewby’s letter.

**'But look at this, my dear sir,' said the rector, striking his fist upon the bedpost for emphasis. 'Here are you, Stephen Fitzmaurice Smith, living in London, but springing from Caxbury. Here in this book is a genealogical tree of the Stephen Fitzmaurice Smiths of Caxbury Manor. You may be only a family of professional men now--I am not inquisitive: I don't ask questions of that kind; it is not in me to do so--but it is as plain as the nose in you face that there's your origin! And, Mr. Smith, I congratulate you upon your blood; blue blood, sir; and, upon my life, a very desirable colour, as the world goes.'** (20)

Swancourt is frustrated with being essentially cut off from more polite society--in one sense like the king in a chess game, deprived of mobility and dependent upon the sacrifices of others (the Luxellians for instance, who allow him their acquaintance), and in another sense like the bishop, fated to travel only half of the social playing field, separated from those "who won't be friends with [him]" (21), and incessantly colliding with those whom he feels himself to be above.<sup>5</sup> His cursory, albeit enthusiastic, research

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<sup>5</sup>One indication that the chess motif is not simply an allegorical tool for Hardy is that a strict one-to-one correspondence between characters and chess pieces is undercut by the numerous associations which suggest themselves throughout the novel. For instance, Swancourt is not only a kind of slow moving King, but also an acutely restricted bad Bishop, "a Bishop that is unable to function aggressively because it is impeded by its own pawns. Two of the characteristics of the Bishop are its great range and its limitation to squares of one colour. If these squares are occupied by its own pawns it loses mobility and is forced into the passive role of defending them. An extreme case of the bad Bishop is one that has been forced to defend a pawn or pawns by joining a pawn chain, thus becoming little better than a pawn itself" (Brace 26). This frustrating sense of confinement in which a bad Bishop becomes hampered by its own pawn is established by Hardy in the novel's opening scene: "Ugh-h-h!... 'Od plague you, you young scamp! don't put anything there! I can't bear the weight of a fly.' 'O, I am sorry, papa, I forgot; I thought you might be cold,' she said, hastily removing the rug she had thrown upon the feet of the sufferer; and waiting till she saw that consciousness of her offense had passed from his face, she withdrew from the room, and retired again downstairs" (10). Swancourt's ailment prevents him from moving at all and Elfride herself appears confined within the limits of the staircase which she perpetually ascends and descends. Elfride is worried that while it is "plainly a case of necessity" (9), Hewby's assistant might think their position odd, but the "bad bishop" recognizes that their situation is such that they have little choice in the matter.

into Stephen's genealogy is not for the benefit of his guest so much as for his own need to find himself in the company of a fellow gentleman and not in the hands of yet another pretentious pawn. This becomes readily apparent when having once established Stephen's ancestry, Swancourt then immediately embarks upon a description of his own: "'Now look—see how far back in the mists of antiquity my own family of Swancourt have a root. Here, you see,' he continued, turning the page, 'is Geoffrey, the one among my ancestors who lost a barony because he would cut his joke'" (20-21).<sup>6</sup> Swancourt's feelings of isolation cause him to have this pretentious attachment with the past and impart it to his impressionable daughter. He firmly believes that by a close study of the appropriate texts, coupled with a clever and careful manoeuvring, the Swancourt family can climb out of its social stalemate and recapture its lost position.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>The extent to which Swancourt relies on Burke's text to prevent his family's social deterioration and improve public connections is telling. In attempting to thwart the re-emergence of past incidents that have brought about his current isolation, Swancourt goes so far as to correct the inappropriate behaviour of his family's ancestors in his own personality. For instance, because Baron Geoffrey lost his title through an inability to curb his weakness for joke-telling, Swancourt always checks himself when he is about to relate a story that is "too bad to tell" (21).

<sup>7</sup>However, an important thematic idea in the text which the chess motif speaks to directly is the notion that the past is irretrievable, and that characters who set their sights on accomplishing this feat are destined for disappointment. In *Unity in Hardy's Novels: 'Repetitive Symmetries'* (1982), Peter Casagrande convincingly argues that the irretrievability of the past manifests itself in both the disastrous collapse of the church tower and the general decay of Hardy's Wessex landscape: "In *Blue Eyes*, he attempted to build an ambitious analogy between the difficulties of spiritual renewal and the difficulties of architectural restoration. I am referring not just to the all-too-sudden collapse of the tower of Endelstow Church at the precise moment that Knight discovers Elfride's past loves and bemoans his ruin in the words of Milton's Adam: 'Fool'd and beguiled: by him thou, I by thee!' (ch. 31). This heavy-handed attempt to parallel the careers of men and of buildings merely hints at a deeper analogy at work in the novel that Hardy himself would describe in his 1895 Preface to the novel. There he spoke of *Blue Eyes* as 'an imaginary history of three human hearts, whose emotions were not without

Swancourt's abnormal confidence in the powers of Burke's text is illuminated by considering the topological relationship between a genealogical tree and the algorithmic web of decisions that underlie both the prevailing chess motif and the social game playing in which Elfride's father engages. Swancourt believes that proving the validity of one's pretensions to a higher class is no more difficult than tracing his family's lineage through the pages of Burke's *Peerage*. His perceived right to privilege derives from the absurd belief that as part of a genealogical tree, his family is legitimately entitled to the status held by its most successful ascendant. Therefore, in his social game playing, Swancourt is prone to overestimate those whose social position he envies and, consequently, underestimate anyone whose origins could threaten his cherished class ascension. In effect, Swancourt plays chess with his social ambitions; having knowledge of a formerly favourable position or past victory dictates that the course of play must see his current position improve to that previous standard. Naturally, this line of reasoning gets him into trouble because an understanding of position--whether it be contained in a genealogical

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correspondence' with the 'wild and tragic features' of the rugged Cornish coast and 'the crude Gothic art of the ecclesiastical buildings scattered along it'. He went a step further: 'To restore the gray carcasses of a medievalism whose spirit has fled seemed a not less incongruous act than to set about renovating the adjoining crags themselves'. Though he does not take it, a third step seems possible; the restoration or renovation of human hearts must be equally incongruous. There can be no return for Smith, no recovery for Knight, no redemption for Elfride, because their lives correspond to the disintegrating rocks of the water-worn coast and the crumbling stones of the churches along it" (88). The pattern that Casagrande describes is also reflected in the presence of the chess motif. In a chess game, the recovery of a lost position is seldom possible if the opponent is careful not to relinquish the advantage. When Elfride sacrifices herself for Stephen only to then sacrifice Stephen for Knight, she alters her game to the extent that she is prevented from reclaiming her previous position. In addition, the careful scrutiny of her opponent, Mrs. Jethway, makes Elfride's efforts to ignore her mistake with Stephen impossible.

tree or within the confines of a chess board—is the recognition and appreciation of numerous factors, and not simply the acknowledgement of a relationship between two unrelated points.

### 2.3. Elfride is Taught to Subject her Position to Tactical Considerations

Because a favourable marriage by Elfride could resurrect her family's fallen prestige, Swancourt endeavours to instill in his daughter his concept of playing for position. He believes that Elfride needs instruction to this end, discouraged as he is by the patterns of behaviour established by her female relatives: "[T]he family history sets her the example of unorthodox behaviour: her mother eloped with Mr. Swancourt in defiance of her family, and her grandmother's romantic elopement with a musician is a matter of local legend" (Rimmer 208). Because of the faith Swancourt places in Burke's *Peerage* as irrefutable proof of his blue-blooded ancestry, he decides that the solution to his class crisis lies in suppressing the possibility of his daughter's romantic attachment to a member of the working class, while at the same time doing nothing to discourage her relationships with men who appear to move in the appropriate social circles. For Swancourt, Elfride is not simply a pawn to be manipulated towards promotion, but a potentially mad queen in need of a controlling hand.

The latter idea is critical in understanding Swancourt's inability to instruct his young daughter judiciously in the art of social game playing. Swancourt's faith in the notion that affluence through social ascension is the direct result of traversing a very specific course finds itself undermined by his attempt to use Elfride as a pawn in controlling her capabilities as a queen. In so doing, Swancourt is unable to teach Elfride

about herself; he wants to take advantage of her ability to bring the family out of bankruptcy without allowing her to realize her full potential as an autonomous individual, simply because there is no room for this in his clever scheming. This has a controlling influence on the manner in which Elfride becomes trapped within her search to be free of the problems that plague her romantic involvements. At those moments in the novel when it is imperative that she look upon herself as having the self-directing powers of a queen, she can only manage to see herself as an isolated pawn.

Swancourt naturally views the bettering of social position as the only stake worth playing for, and endeavours to convince Elfride of this in explaining his dispassionate marriage of convenience with Mrs. Troyton: "'Elfride, I am past love, you know, and I honestly confess that I married her for your sake. Why a woman of her standing should have thrown herself away upon me, God knows. But I suppose her age and plainness were too pronounced for a town man. With your good looks, if you now play your cards well, you may marry anybody'" (121). Swancourt is unable to recognize that Elfride is not past love, and that her choice of a husband might be influenced by such "unprofitable" considerations as romantic affection and sexual attraction. As the somewhat feeble king, Swancourt is comfortable with getting Mrs. Troyton to resign, but Elfride's search for autonomy encourages her to play for a mate. Swancourt tries to instruct by example, but it is one riddled with inconsistencies and alien to a daughter who understands the concept of a relationship as involving a complex of emotions rather than a simple set of economic exchanges.

If an inability to comprehend her father's attitude towards marriage impairs

Elfride's positional play, it is further marred by the fact that he teaches her the art of making precarious assumptions about others and then hastily forming fixed opinions about them. Swancourt is immediately convinced of Stephen's blue blood—blood which turns out to run through the veins of an ancestor who practised the art of assistant gardening—and subsequently decides within a few minutes of meeting his guest that it is as though he has known him "for five or six years" (21). But the instant Swancourt learns of Stephen's humble beginnings, he immediately converts all positive assessments of the young man's character into negative ones, and forges a new image of Elfride's suitor in his own mind. He even manages to disparage those qualities in Stephen with which it seems impossible to find fault: "Uniform pleasantness is rather a defect than a faculty. It shows that a man hasn't sense enough to know whom to despise'" (85).

Swancourt also sets a poor precedent for his daughter in the various schemes he devises to bring his family out of its present situation. His errant investments in mines and railways serve to reinforce his mistaken belief that "desperate" financial situations can somehow be remedied by spending large amounts of capital, and that position is ultimately subject to tactical considerations.<sup>8</sup> Like the false and speculative lines of play found amid the network of choices and decisions on the chess board, the symbolism of the mine and the railway is crucial in illustrating how Swancourt either buries his money in the earth or places it on a pair of infinite rails leading nowhere. He tries to escape his problems rather than confront them because the latter would force him to acknowledge

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<sup>8</sup>This is very much the antithesis of the principle that is fundamental to a strategic game like chess, where tactics must always be undertaken with positional considerations in mind.

that a more complex solution is required than he is willing to admit. Indeed, this logic helps to inform and convolute many of Elfride's own decisions in the novel.

### 3. How Elfride Plays the Game

#### 3.1. The Opening

Elfride's game commences like the opening stages of a chess game upon Stephen's unexpected arrival: "Her start of amazement at the sight of the visitor coming forth from under the stairs proved that she had not been expecting this surprising flank movement, which had been originated entirely by the ingenuity of William Worm" (15).<sup>9</sup> The narrative adopts the terms of an ambush to characterize this first encounter between Stephen and Elfride. The latter is immediately caught off guard because her expectations of being engaged in a more direct manner are thrown into disarray by Worm's decision to lead Stephen in through what is presumably the servant's entrance. Although Elfride has studied her father's correspondence with Hewby, there is nothing in the contents of either letter to prepare her for such an opening. The irony of this seemingly innocuous scene becomes readily apparent when we later learn of Stephen's humble origins. Not only does he enter the rectory by the back door, but he enters into the Swancourts' social circle in the very same fashion. Stephen accepts the fact that the front door is stuck fast and that the "Turk can't open [it]" (14), and indicates by his willingness to follow Worm

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<sup>9</sup>Most chess games begin with white playing either 1. e4 or 1. d4, advancing one of the centre pawns two squares. In the nineteenth century, flank openings were considered dubious, because they did not fit in with the general plan of occupying the centre with pawns and pieces. Not until the hypermodern revolt of the early twentieth century did chess authorities acknowledge that it was possible to control activity in the centre from the flanks. Presumably, Stephen's flank opening betrays his lack of strategic skill in matters of social etiquette.

that he is an individual of modest origins.

Elfride is further caught off guard because instead of confronting a seasoned opponent—"the dark, taciturn, sharp, elderly man of business who had lurked in her imagination—a man with clothes smelling of city smoke, skin sallow from want of sun, and talk flavoured with epigram" (15)—she finds herself standing before someone not unlike herself in appearance: "Judging from his look, London was the last place in the world that one would have imagined to be the scene of his activities: such a face surely could not be nourished amid the smoke and mud and fog and dust. His complexion was as fine as Elfride's own; the pink of his cheeks almost as delicate. His mouth as perfect as Cupid's bow in form, and as cherry red in colour as hers" (15). Elfride is put at ease by the fact that Stephen is not what she had expected, and like her father, appears to abandon any sense of caution or reserve. She finds relief in the physical similarities she shares with her guest as proof of a shared affinity, much in the same way that Swancourt delves into Stephen's genealogy to establish a connection between himself and his guest. Thus, Elfride becomes a casualty of her own penchant for formulating hasty opinions about others based on faulty assumptions. This tendency causes her to let down her guard at critical moments, as when she allows Stephen a kind of intimacy by singing to him "airs...that [she] only half know[s]" (23), because he impresses her as one who is not "critical, or experienced, or—much to mind" (23). She allows this guard to drop further when she makes the admission that most men think her life "a dreadful bore in its normal state" (24) with the implication that she yearns for more than the isolation of the parish community.

During the scene in which she tells Stephen about writing Swancourt's sermons for him, Elfride demonstrates her proclivity for being too familiar, only to regret it and attempt immediate rectification: "after this childish burst of confidence, she was frightened, as if warned by womanly instinct, which for the moment her ardour had outrun, that she had been too forward to a comparative stranger" (31). Indeed, this awkward feature of Elfride's character is a recurrent one. In yearning to sever her dependence on Swancourt and gain a measure of freedom, Elfride is prone to rash action, but in the performance of that action she is frequently checked by the principles she has been taught to uphold. One of the manifestations of this longing to take back moves is found in her predisposition for telling secrets, and the present scene subtly captures how the telling of secrets works to paralyze Elfride's progress in her search to be free of certain constraints.<sup>10</sup> Elfride reveals to Stephen the secret that she writes her father's sermons for him, but in so doing must ask Stephen to keep this information secret. When Elfride says, "'he talks to people and to me about what he said in his sermon today, and forgets that I wrote it for him'" (30), she unburdens herself from the anxiety she feels

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<sup>10</sup>The question also arises as to the extent Elfride is kept in check by the narrator's biased assessment. Rimmer observes that much of the commentary provided by the narrator is "itself part of a typically Hardy narrative game" (212) and that we are given ample opportunity to disagree with his perspective, especially as it relates to Elfride: "If the arbitrariness of chance in Hardy's novels makes us into pawns, the narrator's often arbitrary judgments enlarge our role in the game by making us players as well as pieces" (212). Indeed, just as Elfride finds herself in a frustrating game of trying to subvert social expectation and achieve a kind of freedom, only to realize that Fate ultimately thwarts this achievement, so do readers find themselves in a challenging game of trying to discover who Elfride is beneath the layers of sexist sentiment brought on by Swancourt's patronizing treatment of his daughter, and the biased commentary of the narrator/annotator that limits and devalues her.

in not taking any of the credit for what she writes; however, she can only do this by establishing another secret. In this case there appears to be little harm done because she confides a rather innocuous bit of information in the trustworthy Stephen, but this sort of game becomes deadly when fate allows a character like Mrs. Jethway to get hold of Elfride's most intimate secrets.<sup>11</sup>

A related source of frustration for Elfride in her efforts to be free of social constraints is that she has difficulty in ascertaining whether Stephen is an appropriate partner in helping her to achieve this goal. Should she despise Stephen's awkward deficiencies or admire his attempts to overcome them? This confusion manifests itself most tellingly in the chess match they play, and because of the game's symbolic parallels with their romantic involvement, it informs their entire relationship. When Elfride plays chess against Stephen, she perceives that he is a beginner and has "a very odd way of handling the pieces when castling or taking a man" (50). The narrative discloses that this is a source of great consternation for Elfride:

Antecedently she would have supposed that the same performance must be gone through by all players in the same manner; she was taught by his differing action that all ordinary players, who learn the game by sight, unconsciously touch the men in a stereotyped way. This impression of indescribable oddness in Stephen's touch culminated in speech when she saw him, at the taking of one of her bishops, push it aside with the taking man instead of lifting it as a preliminary to the move. (50-51)

Stephen's actions are consistent with those of a chess novice. Experienced players remove the captured piece before placing their own on the square in question. This was

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<sup>11</sup>Elfride plays her greatest tactical miscue in the presence of her most dangerous opponent, and is then forced to hope in vain that Mrs. Jethway will not take advantage of the secret weakness she has learned.

the case even in Hardy's day as Howard Staunton implies while examining a specific position in his *Chess Player's Handbook* (1847): "it being either party's turn to play, he could take the adverse pawn from the board, and place his King on the square it occupied" (8). Rimmer convincingly argues that Stephen's difficulty in manipulating the chess pieces has serious class implications: "Stephen, who has taught himself the game from a book, regards chess as one of his passports to middle-class status. He knows that his unorthodox handling of the chess pieces threatens to identify him as an interloper, just as his peculiar Latin pronunciation does" (206). Another implication of Stephen's awkward use of the pieces is that he will prove inadequate in "handling" Elfride once he has won her heart. In addition, his clumsy castling manoeuvre foreshadows both his failure to secure her as a wife and his further inability to protect her from her own mistaken perceptions of herself.

Elfride's feelings of "indescribable oddness" towards her guest are not simply the result of his lack of familiarity with practical play, but the product of her own assumptions about class difference which she has, in part, inherited from Swancourt. She is alerted to her opponent's ineptitude by Stephen's admission that his theoretical knowledge has never been tested by practical experience. His mediocre abilities are then confirmed by his subsequent play which Elfride recognizes to be that of a novice. However, instead of approaching Stephen as an opponent to be objectively contested against, Elfride determines that he both requires and deserves special treatment: "It was the cruellest thing to checkmate him after so much labour, she considered. What was she dishonest enough to do in her compassion? To let him checkmate her" (53). Elfride's

heart tells her to let Stephen win because his labour and perseverance deserve reward, but in so doing she finds herself gripped by the need to show that his winning is nothing more than a game on her part.

Hence, while Elfride is said to be "absolutely indifferent as to the result" (53), she is quick to make up for the two defeats by crushing Stephen in the third game. Although the narrative does not comment on the matter, Elfride's sudden improvement betrays the actions of a player who, in letting an opponent get the better of her to a certain point, now decides that she must assert her superiority in a swift and decisive manner: "'You have been trifling with me till now!' [Stephen] exclaimed, his face flushing. "'You did not play your best in the first two games?'" (53). Elfride's decisions in the chess game are based on her confusion about whether to feel admiration or disdain for her adversary. She perceives that Stephen is not an ordinary opponent and, confronted with the choice of speaking out or keeping silent, proceeds to embarrass him by commenting on his handling of the pieces. However, she then allows Stephen to win undeservedly by having compassion for his fighting "at such a disadvantage and so manfully" (54). Confronted with a final choice, she humiliates and lessens him in asserting her dominance at the game. The result is that she both embarrasses her opponent, making him "the picture of vexation and sadness" (53), and experiences her own feelings of guilt and regret.

Elfride's difficulty in coming to terms with Stephen's character problematizes her relationship with him. Because Swancourt principally sees others as valuable pieces or expendable pawns, he can admire Stephen and then all at once dismiss him. However, Elfride is unable to do this because she sees that the revelation of her lover's humble

origins does not nullify his positive qualities or somehow solve the existing complexity of his character. Swancourt can redefine Stephen's actions as essentially dishonourable in light of the new information he learns about him, but Elfride recognizes that such a rigid reinterpretation oversimplifies things. Thus, whereas her father finds liberation in trapping himself within the confines of never really understanding the people around him, Elfride imprisons herself within the cycle of trying desperately to understand. Both have radically different approaches in attempting to control the game from within: Swancourt assumes that his knowledge of the rules is accurate and that he is firmly in control, but Elfride is aware that there is much she does not know and that control is something for which she must constantly strive.

As Elfride's decisions in the chess match with Stephen are constructed around both her diminishing and elevating him as a player, further investigation shows that this behaviour is identical with her approach to Stephen in the larger context of their relationship. On the day following the play at chess, Mr. Swancourt proposes "a drive to the cliffs beyond Targan Bay" (55), but the actual journey must be made on horseback when the carriage axle unexpectedly breaks. Elfride learns that Stephen lacks equestrian skills and she shows her disappointment in a manner that recalls the chess game: "'Fancy a man not able to ride!'" (55). Elfride's class-based criticism questions Stephen's manhood by positing that his inability to ride is vulgar and unnatural. Her words demean him to such an extent that Swancourt is forced to come to his defence: "'That's common enough; he has had other lessons to learn'" (55). However, this defence is laden with

bitter irony; Swancourt eventually rejects Stephen because he is common.<sup>12</sup>

As in their chess match, Elfride both rewards and penalizes Stephen throughout the early part of their relationship by allowing him to assume seemingly important roles, only to humiliate him when he eventually blunders. Elfride mingles airs of dependency and superiority in using Stephen as she would a servant to watch her favourite earrings: "Now, Mr. Smith...you have a task to perform to-day'" (56). While Stephen feels empowered in being entrusted with such a responsibility, Elfride's pretentious authority betrays that she is ordering him about as Swancourt might order her. And because we learn that she has already used her parlour-maid Unity to assist in rediscovering her lost earrings on a number of previous occasions, Stephen is symbolically brought down to the

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<sup>12</sup>Swancourt forms judgments about people strictly on the basis of class—they are either his inferiors, his betters, or perhaps most rarely, his equals. Elfride takes this and adopts a confusing strategy for looking at each individual as her inferior, her better, and her equal. Stephen plays manfully enough to deserve reward, humanly enough to deserve compassion, and badly enough to deserve punishment. He is attractive enough to win her heart, successful enough to win her respect, and coarse enough to win her scorn. Elfride recognizes that although the men in her life occupy different social classes, their worth is not determined on this basis alone. Like a chess player, she recognizes the importance of the relative values of her men. Smith might only be a pawn, but he has a great potential to become passed—and, of course, this is precisely what happens when he accepts the position in India. Knight (knight) and Swancourt (bishop) are essentially equal but in certain situations they dominate over one another and over Elfride. Knight replaces Swancourt as Elfride's "lord" during their courtship, but after the break-up when Elfride goes to Knight and is followed by Swancourt, Knight has no choice but to let himself be dominated by the oblivious bishop: "Knight, soul-sick and weary of his life, did not arouse himself to utter a word in reply. How should he defend himself when his defence was the accusation of Elfride? On that account he felt a miserable satisfaction in letting her father go on thinking and speaking wrongfully. It was a faint ray of pleasure straying into the great gloominess of his brain to think that the rector might never know but that he, as her lover, tempted her away, which seemed to be the form Mr. Swancourt's misapprehension had taken" (332). For a further discussion of the relative values of the pieces see Appendix 3.

level of a mere servant. How fitting it is that as soon as she is through with her recollections, Elfride allows Stephen to lift her onto her horse, a moment of erotic contact that physically and symbolically raises her as it lowers him, but which ultimately brings her tumbling down when Stephen can not get her properly seated. When Swancourt advises Stephen to try again, Elfride will have no part of it, and confers upon her suitor the lowest possible place by assigning his duties to the workhand Worm. The symbolism of this episode reinforces the theme of Elfride's frustrated progress, of being trapped within the cycle of trying to free herself of social constraints. In failing to perform the simple task of getting Elfride properly seated, Stephen is revealed to be inadequate as a partner in her bid for liberation. His awkward Latin pronunciation, clumsy manoeuvring of chess pieces, and ungraceful manipulation of Elfride herself, all look forward to his mishandling of the marriage license and their aborted plans to be together. Therefore, just as Swancourt fails his daughter in being too rigid in his control, Stephen fails her in being too passive.

As Stephen walks beside Elfride—who by this point has managed to get herself properly seated—their relative positions suggest a symbolic distance that she augments by all at once galloping off and leaving him behind: "Stephen beheld her light figure contracting to the dimensions of a bird as she sank into the distance—her hair flowing. He walked on in the same direction, and for a considerable time could see no signs of her returning. Dull as a flower without the sun he sat down upon a stone, and not for fifteen minutes was any sound of horse or rider to be heard" (57-58). Elfride appears to abandon Stephen in the same cruel manner that she crushes him in their final chess game

after giving him the illusion that he is an equal opponent. And although this looks forward in symbolic fashion to her eventual rejection of Stephen in favour of Knight, the whole concept of Elfride rejecting Stephen is illusory—a kind of sham sacrifice—because Mrs. Jethway's knowledge of their elopement binds them inseparably.

Elfride's confusion in the opening stages of her relationship with Stephen is again underscored during the scene in which she blushinglly consents to look into Stephen's eyes, but then forbids him to express his affection for her romantically. The illusion that she fully accepts Stephen as an equal by allowing him to look at her is dispelled by her insistence that he kiss her in the manner that a subject shows fidelity to his mistress, or a pawn to its Queen: "He expressed by a look that to kiss a hand through a glove, and that a riding-glove, was not a great treat in the circumstances. 'There, then; I'll take my glove off. Isn't it a pretty white hand? Ah, you don't want to kiss it, and you shall not now!'" (58). However, Elfride adopts not only the role of a queen bestowing royal favour, but that of a pawn subjecting herself to the will of her king, and it is little wonder that Stephen regards her as both the object of his sexual passion and as the "queen" for whom he would give anything.

Elfride continually chides Stephen for his improper conduct, suggesting that he forces her to "behave in not a nice way at all" (59), and the reader wonders whether this is the same attitude that prompts her to cheat for him during the chess match. When he sits across from her as an opponent in the chess game, Stephen is mildly scolded for his awkward handling of the pieces. When he takes his place as Elfride's suitor, he is either perceived as the bumbling fool who can not get her properly seated on her horse, the

too-familiar lover who struggles for her hand, or the coarse suitor who has the unmitigated temerity to plunk himself down beside her in a manner that is hardly proper. Her consistent devaluation of him culminates with a moment of triumph which recalls her emotion when she seriously undertakes to defeat Stephen in their final game of chess: "What a proud moment it was for Elfride then! She was ruling a heart with absolute despotism for the first time in her life" (58). But the complexity of Elfride's relationship with Stephen derives from the fact that although she has a tendency to patronize and humiliate him, she is nonetheless in love, even though she is often unable to express this love without emasculating him: "I know, I think, what I love you for. You are nice-looking, of course; but I didn't mean for that. It is because you are so docile and gentle.' 'Those are not quite the correct qualities for a man to be loved for,' said Stephen, in a rather dissatisfied tone of self-criticism" (63).

During the first two chess games, the narrator mentions that Elfride is "absolutely indifferent as to the result" (53), although we learn this to be not wholly true when she crushes Stephen in the final game. This has its parallel in the game of indifference that Elfride plays with her suitor when she becomes displeased about his constant mention of Knight during their return from the cliffs beyond Targan Bay:

At this point in the discussion she trotted off to turn a corner which was avoided by the footpath, the road and the path reuniting at a point a little further on. On again making her appearance she continually managed to look in a direction away from him, and left him in the cool shade of her displeasure. Stephen was soon beaten at this game of indifference. He went round and entered the range of her vision. (65)

Just as in the final chess game, Elfride consciously chooses a path that leaves Stephen feeling beaten and insecure. She takes advantage of his docility and gentleness—the

qualities for which she claims to love him—by forcing him to admit that his affection for her outweighs his respect for Knight.

When Elfride uses the Muzio Gambit to defeat Stephen in the third game of their match, the opening system she employs acts as a metaphor of the events that are to follow. The Muzio Gambit is a variation of the King's Gambit, a romantic opening popular in the nineteenth century. Characterized by the moves 1. e4 e5, 2. f4 exf4, 3. Nf3 g5, 4. Bc4 g4, 5. O-O gxf3, 6. Qxf3, the Muzio Gambit has the White player sacrificing first a pawn and then a knight both for the sake of development and a natural attack along the semi-open f-file.<sup>13</sup> The crux of this opening system lies in whether or not White can succeed in delivering checkmate before the material sacrificed unbalances the game in Black's favour. Hardy's reference to the Muzio Gambit invites the reader to draw important parallels between the representative pieces of that particular opening system and the characters involved in the social game playing of the novel. It is a simple matter to see Stephen as a sacrificed pawn, adored by Elfride but ultimately given up for

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<sup>13</sup>In his *Chess Player's Handbook*, Staunton gives a brief theoretical and historical synopsis of the gambit before examining specific variations: "In the two defences to the King's Gambit by Salvio and Cochrane...when the second player for his fourth move advances his P. to K. Kt.'s 5th, attacking the Knight, White replies by moving his Knight to King's 5th, subjecting himself, as was shown, to a counter-attack, from which escape without loss is difficult if not impracticable. From this circumstance, apparently, originated the conception of the 'Muzio Gambit,' wherein the first player instead of removing the attacked Knight boldly abandons him, and by castling is enabled to bring an almost overwhelming array of forces to the immediate assault of the adverse King. The earliest knowledge of this magnificent variation, the most daring and brilliant, and at the same time, as modern discoveries have shown, the most sound and enduring method of attack yet known, is derived from Salvio, (*Trattio del l'Invention et Arte Liverale del Gioco di Schacchi*. Naples, 1604,) to whom it had been communicated by Signor Muzio as occurring in casual practice between Don Geronimo Cascio and another player" (Staunton 279).

the chance of maintaining her present position (by aborting the elopement) or possibly improving it (through her relationship with Knight). But the symbolism of the Muzio Gambit suggests that Stephen corresponds to White's f-pawn, and this carries with it a number of additional implications.

Chess theorists have long debated the relative value of the pieces, and whether the pawns have their own hierarchical system with respect to their placement on the board. The f-pawn has been recognized by critics as particularly weak because it begins the game on the f2 square for White and the f7 square for Black; these squares have the distinction of being protected only by the King in the initial position, while the remaining pawns are afforded significantly better protection. Because the f-pawn's original square is thus the source of frequent mating attacks,<sup>14</sup> many open games centre around alleviating the pressure on this defensive point. Elfride makes the decision to sacrifice Stephen rather than hold onto him because this would mean subjecting her own position to serious jeopardy, both from the unrelenting verbal attacks of her father and the general disapproval of polite society.

However, one of the dangers of advancing the f-pawn at such an early stage in the game is that it exposes the e1-h4 diagonal, a line available for the Black Queen to deliver check. With a further weakening of the White King's field taking place, the

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<sup>14</sup>A textbook example of exploiting the weak KB2 square comes from the only surviving game of Philidor's mentor, the great Legall de Kermeur: "Legall--St.Brie, Paris 1750. Philidor's Defence. 1. e4 e5 2. Bc4 d6 3. Nf3 Bg4 4. Nc3 g6 5. Nxe5 Bxd1 6. Bxf7+ Ke7 7. Nd5 mate" (Fox and James 115).

results of such a check can prove devastating.<sup>15</sup> If Hardy's novel has a Black Queen who is eager to deliver such a check it is Mrs. Jethway, whose knowledge of Stephen's sacrifice provides her the means to attack Elfride where the damage will be most acute. Just as the movement of the Black King's pawn allows the Black Queen access for attack, so does the premature death of Mrs. Jethway's son provide the impetus for her to ruin Elfride and lay waste to her social position.

It would be foolish to think that once Stephen is sacrificed for the sake of Elfride's development and she becomes involved with Knight there is no more to be said about this sacrificed pawn. However, Hardy understands that in life, as in chess, what is gained must be weighed against what is given up, and that if Stephen's sacrifice can not be brought to good account then his loss will reveal itself in the most damning way. The Muzio Gambit is a fitting metaphor for Elfride's tragic progression because so much is sacrificed or lost that the resulting imbalance proves to have fatal consequences.

### 3.2. The Transition to the Middlegame

The novel's transition to the middlegame begins with the misreported account of John Smith's hand being "squashed...to a pummy" (79) and Stephen's revelation to Swancourt that his family is not descended from the Smiths of Caxbury Manor. Elfride now embarks on a long-term strategy for marrying secretly while deceiving her father into thinking that she can give up Stephen as easily as she might relinquish a sacrificed pawn. However, a consideration of the novel's recurring chess motif reveals that those

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<sup>15</sup>The most well known example of this is the Fool's Mate, the shortest sequence of moves in chess that can bring about checkmate. 1. f3 e5 2. g4?? Qh4#.

factors which have plagued Elfride's relationship with Stephen from the beginning--her penchant for making hasty decisions and then changing her mind, his self-deprecation and inability to take control of matters, and their shared need to be secretive about their romantic involvement--will prove most damaging in the dangerous game that has now been undertaken.

Although he never lacks praise for Elfride's moderate chess skills, Swancourt has hypocritically ingrained in his daughter that she is rather a poor judge of things and prone to confuse "future probabilities with present facts" (84). Indeed, by making unsound financial investments in attempting to recapture his family's fallen prestige, Swancourt teaches Elfride by his own example to make the same kinds of rash decisions from which he otherwise attempts to dissuade her. Ultimately, both characters encounter severe setbacks because they think the games in which they are involved have solutions, and that they are winnable rather than simply playable.<sup>16</sup>

The chess motif reveals that Elfride's penchant for self-contradiction makes her a poor tactician in the social game playing in which she is presently engaged. Elfride's unsound tactical ability, influenced by Swancourt's numerous precedents, never fails to create weaknesses in her social position, and this reveals itself most tellingly in her aborted elopement. Her decision to marry Stephen and bring him into the family by

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<sup>16</sup>This is a common theme in nineteenth and twentieth century novels that feature a controlling chess motif. Carroll's Alice believes that becoming a Queen will win her the game by bringing her the social power she yearns for; Nabokov's Luzhin thinks that he can find a defense to the irresistible combination that life plays against him; and even Beckett's Clov--resigned as he is to a perpetual endgame--briefly places his hopes on the boy he sees near the close of the play.

secret means is a plan that requires tactical play beginning with a positional sacrifice on her part, but the problem is that instead of making the sacrifice and seeing it through to the end, or declining it and calling off the elopement, Elfride sacrifices only to then fall back, without realizing that Mrs. Jethway's scheming will ensure that her deteriorating position is devoid of compensation.<sup>17</sup>

Hardy carefully prepares the reader for the disaster of the aborted elopement in preceding scenes where Elfride takes various risks involving her physical safety. Such episodes show how often Elfride's efforts to demonstrate her autonomy are undercut by the circumstances in which she finds herself. One such scene occurs when Elfride and Stephen are returning from their visit to the Luxellian mansion:

There was no absolute necessity for either of them to alight, but as it was the rector's custom after a long journey to humour the horse in making this winding ascent, Elfride, moved by an imitative instinct, suddenly jumped out when Pleasant had just begun to adopt the deliberate stalk he associated with this portion of the road.

The young man seemed glad of any excuse for breaking the silence. 'Why, Miss Swancourt, what a risky thing to do.' (45)<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>In his analysis of the Muzio Gambit, Staunton examines a hypothetical game that illuminates the problem of what happens to Elfride's position when Mrs. Jethway becomes party to her secret non-marriage to Stephen. After the moves 1. e4 e5, 2. f4 exf4, 3. Nf3 g5, 4. Bc4 g4, 5. O-O gxf3, Staunton recommends capturing the pawn with 6. Qxf3 because otherwise "Black speedily gains an advantage" (Staunton 280). Elfride does not take the opportunity to secure the mate she has played for, but instead chooses to fall back, and this leads to a distinct advantage for Mrs. Jethway. Staunton's analysis continues: 6. d4? d5!, 7. Bxd5 Bg4, 8. Rf2 c6, 9. Bb3 Bg7, 10. c3 Bh6, 11. Nd2 Ne7 and Black is better (280).

<sup>18</sup>A parallel incident is Elfride's precarious and seemingly foolhardy walk upon the parapet of the church tower in the presence of Henry Knight. Once again, Elfride's action is both an attempt to detach herself from a male visitor she deems to have committed the sin of paying an insufficient amount of attention to her, while at the same time trying to win that attention over: "Knight was not in a talkative mood that morning. Elfride was rather wilful, by reason of his inattention, which she privately set down to

The explicit irony of Elfride's bold and deliberate move is that it is made in imitation of Swancourt, the source of her tactical knowledge. The symbolic value afforded by the image of her leaping down from the carriage and rendering herself different from Stephen is undercut by the very real danger she is forced to encounter. This suggests that on some level she associates autonomy with self-injury. Furthermore, Elfride's action is immediately followed by Stephen's offer to take her hand as they continue walking, and although she puts him off temporarily—"No, thank you, Mr. Smith; I can get along by myself" (46)—she rationalizes a way to avoid resisting the proposal for very long: "It was Elfride's first attempt at browbeating a lover. Fearing more the issue of such an undertaking than what a gentle young man might think of her waywardness, she immediately afterwards determined to please herself by reversing her statement" (46). In this scene as in others, Elfride's desperate act of achieving some semblance of autonomy through hazardous means only brings her back into the literal and figurative control of the novel's patriarchal representatives.

The chess motif helps us to see in general terms that because Elfride acts rashly and is prone to retract moves, she is liable to fare poorly in the secretive game of marrying herself to Stephen. However, an understanding of the specific principles

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his thinking her not worth talking to" (159-60). Elfride enjoys playfully mocking Knight in asking him to follow her, knowing full well that he has no inclination to do so, but this show of wilfulness is counterbalanced by the whole episode being something of a performance for Knight's benefit. Not surprisingly, Elfride miscalculates and falls from the parapet directly into Knight's arms: "Already lowered to that state, his words completely overpowered her, and she swooned away as he held her" (160). She struggles to be free of Knight, in the same way that she initially declines the offer of Stephen's hand—but this is only a temporary gesture of resistance. Once again, Elfride is quickly brought under control.

involved in opening and middlegame play can illuminate how Elfride's miscarried flight with Stephen provides for the permanent collapse of her entire game. One of the most important elements in a chess opening or early middlegame is time, and whichever side is said to have the most *tempi* is often the one with the advantage, especially if this is accompanied with similar advantages in force and space. When Elfride arrives in London with Stephen and all at once decides to return, she appears to make the mistake of a novice player who thinks that there is nothing wrong with moving a piece and then returning it to its initial position on a subsequent move: "'Will you allow me to go home?' she implored. 'I won't trouble you to go with me. I will not be any weight upon you; only say you will agree to my returning; that you will not hate me for it, Stephen! It is better that I should return again; indeed it is, Stephen'" (113). The problem with making a move and then returning the moved piece to its original square on the next turn is that the player doing so allows the opponent time to marshal his or her forces. Elfride recognizes this only after she has returned from London, and the terms in which she summarizes her position could well be applied to a chess game in which her rash movements have proven costly: "'I did not see all the consequences,' she said. 'Appearances are woefully against me...It was my only safe defence. I see more things now than I did yesterday. My only remaining chance is not to be discovered; and that we must fight for most desperately'" (114). Of course, these words are no sooner spoken than Mrs. Jethway's "glistening eyes" spot the couple and discern their terrible secret.

The manner in which Elfride plays with Stephen while she plays against him

during their chess match suggests that although he is representative of the patriarchal system that imprisons Elfride within her discouraging search for liberation, his passivity and equivocation allow her to transgress the established norms of Victorian society. As Rimmer observes, "[Elfride] disrupts the social order more seriously than her rebellious forbears; her mother's and grandmother's clandestine marriages allow them to be accepted back into their families, but Elfride's anomalous position after her abortive elopement with Stephen resists conventional definition and leaves her without firm connections to either Stephen or her father" (208). Stephen proves to be not only a weak opponent, but an equally ineffectual partner, and his play brings out his passivity and willingness to compromise, like a chess player only too willing to accept a draw or stalemate in a superior position. Elfride endangers her social position by making hasty assumptions and rash decisions, and Stephen is ineffective in preventing this from happening. He watches the game being played out before him and can offer a limited amount of counsel to a player like Elfride, but when it comes to interfering directly he inevitably abstains. Indeed, he is frequently ineffectual in dissuading Elfride from embarking upon a rash course of action: "'O Stephen,' she exclaimed, 'I am so miserable! I must go home again--I must--I must! Forgive my wretched vacillation. I don't like it here--nor myself--nor you!'" Stephen looked bewildered, and did not speak" (113). Stephen's skill at handling Elfride is equivalent to his deficient chess skill: although he has a theoretical appreciation of the dangers to which Elfride will expose herself by returning home unmarried, he lacks the practical experience to prevent her from doing so. By partaking in the conspiracy to keep their plans a secret from

Swancourt, he undercuts his ability to prevent Elfride from subjecting herself to the possibility of domestic ruin.

A consideration of the novel's chess motif demonstrates that Elfride's reliance on the element of secrecy in carrying out her plan to marry Stephen is riddled with logical defects which she unconsciously acknowledges during one of their private conversations: "All we want is to render it absolutely impossible for any future circumstance to upset our future intention of being happy together; not to begin being happy now" (96). Like her father, who believes in his ability to control social game playing from his position within the game, Elfride betrays her conviction that through a process of careful manoeuvring, she and Stephen can convince their opponent to resign: "He would then believe that hearts could not be played with; love encouraged be ready to grow, love discouraged be ready to die, at a moment's notice" (97).<sup>19</sup> However, the logical fallacy in this is that Elfride and Stephen make the mistake of assuming that they are playing together against a single opponent, and subsequently look upon their careful deception of Swancourt as proof of a flawless scheme. But in chess, as in social game playing, there is no element of secrecy; the moves of the pieces and the ever-changing position of the board are there for all to see. Who is to say that a quiet bystander like Mrs. Jethway is

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<sup>19</sup>Elfride's words seem to be an echo of the sentiment expressed in the romantic novels she reads, and presumably in her own novel, *The Court of King Arthur's Castle*. The reader will note that Knight's review of the book, although rather disparaging, makes careful note of Elfride's particular "versatility that enables her to use with effect a style of narration peculiar to itself, which may be called a murmuring of delicate emotional trifles, the particular gift of those to whom the social sympathies of a peaceful time are as daily food" (145).

not potentially as much a player as one who purports to be handling the pieces?<sup>20</sup> Elfride and Stephen are not merely carrying out a plan to deceive her father as they believe, but to deceive the very social system that stands in judgment when their plans go awry. By carrying the desire for secrecy to the point where the marriage plans are miscarried and the discovered mate is not played, Elfride leaves herself vulnerable to opponents from every portion of the social chessboard.

Another problem with Elfride's brief discourse on secrecy is her admission that while she ultimately wants to be happy, she does not necessarily "want to begin being happy now" (96). Elfride traps herself within a frustrated cycle in assuming that she can achieve happiness by enduring a series of trials that make her essentially unhappy. Regardless of the fact that she is making one precarious move after another, Elfride hopes to arrive at a position in which she attains the control she has been seeking, but this is no less ludicrous than Swancourt's conviction that by thoughtlessly investing his money he can set his family on the road to economic independence. Elfride initially thinks that marrying Stephen will allow them to win the game they are secretly contesting, but she does not feel the sense of liberation she expected upon arriving in London, the exit from the "maze of rails over which they traced their way" (112). Rather, she is overcome with the gloom of finding herself on an alien square of the chessboard, where she sees "only

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<sup>20</sup>Ironically, a bystander will often see a great deal more than the individuals engaged in the game itself. The players may have a more complete understanding of the strategic features of a position, but the onlooker frequently sees tactical shots which the players have completely overlooked. In addition, the idea that Elfride and Stephen do not recognize all of their potential opponents recalls the misconceptions of Brontë's Helen, who sees both Hargrave and Lady Lowborough as potential threats without immediately realizing the romantic deception practised by her own husband.

the lamps, which had just been lit, blinking in the wet atmosphere, and rows of hideous zinc chimney-pipes in dim relief against the sky" (112). Confronted with the confusion of being on "strange ground," Elfride immediately makes her decision to choose the safety of returning home over seeing her sacrifice through to the end. However, in determining that marriage to Stephen is no longer the key to achieving victory, she can not possibly know that aborting the elopement will make her a pawn in the hands of the vengeful Mrs. Jethway.

### 3.3. The Middlegame Proper

Although Elfride is bound to Stephen through Mrs. Jethway's knowledge of their trip to London, his relocation to India provides her with the opportunity to overcome any lingering feelings of dependency.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, she eventually finds herself becoming increasingly more attracted to the "nice voice [and] singular temper" of Henry Knight, the middle-aged book reviewer who scathingly critiques her novel. Once again, Elfride engages in a series of chess games with a male visitor, although this time she is unable to manipulate her opponent as she would like. This second chess match demonstrates her acute concern with defeating Knight and proving that if he does not respect her abilities as a writer, he has no choice but to respect her abilities as a player. However, Elfride's ruthlessness in seizing the advantage, her desperate but futile attempts to manipulate

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<sup>21</sup>It is interesting that Stephen accepts a position in India, the birthplace of chess. The game is believed to have been invented in the sixth century and to have spread through the Middle East, making its way into Europe c. 1000. Here Stephen undergoes promotion from the pawn that Elfride sacrifices to something much more like a Knight, as we learn from his father upon Stephen's return home: "'Owing to your coming a day sooner than we first expected,' said John, 'you'll find us in a turk of a mess, Sir--' 'Sir,'" says I to my own son! but ye've gone up so Stephen" (220).

Knight when she has blundered, and the building emotion with which she experiences her successive defeats all serve to mirror not only her inability to realize some measure of autonomy, but her gradual forfeiture of the illusion that this autonomy is possible.

When Knight blunders his rook in the first game, Elfride seizes the opportunity without hesitation: "It was her first advantage. She looked triumphant--even ruthless" (163). Elfride does not take pity on Knight for his oversight as she did with Stephen, but instead reminds him of "Club Laws" and the importance of playing by the strictest of rules.<sup>2</sup> This comes in the wake of Knight permitting her to take back previous moves: "[H]e had two or three times allowed her to replace a man on her religiously assuring him that such a move was an absolute blunder" (163-64). By insisting upon the adoption of these new rules, Elfride indicates that this is no disinterested affair but a serious intellectual contest. However, this fundamental interest betrays the fact that she is not in control of things. Elfride subverts the game as a game, as Roger Caillois or Johann Huizinga might argue, because she plays for a stake contained outside the parameters of the game itself. She derives a feeling of control over Stephen by being indifferent as to whether or not she wins (although the reader learns that this is only a half-truth in light of her conduct during the final game of that match), but she can only feel in control against Knight by defeating him and being acknowledged as superior in at least one area of their shared acquaintance.

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<sup>2</sup>The rules of competitive chess have long dictated that a move is considered complete once the player has released the piece onto a square. Staunton maintains that "While a player holds the Piece or Pawn he has touched, he may play it to any other than the square he took it from; but, having quitted it, he cannot recall the move" (36).

When the advantage passes to Knight in the first game and Elfride grows "flurried" and blunders her queen, she humiliates herself in taking every step possible to have her move retracted. First, she claims that only a fool would have made such a move knowingly, the implication being that she is not a fool and that she should be allowed to retract it. When this does not work, she implies that Knight is being unpleasant in taking advantage of her mistake. This failing, she denigrates the very "Club Laws" she promoted only moments before.<sup>23</sup> As Elfride is defeated again and again, she goes from being merely flushed, to being distracted, to being overcome with bitter weeping.<sup>24</sup> It was a simple matter to manipulate Stephen and to have him win and lose as she pleased, but Knight is mechanical and disinterested; he allows her to establish the rules and then simply defeats her in adhering to them. When she finds herself losing the match to him, any illusions she holds with respect to her ability to derive some measure of control are painfully dispelled. Because Knight is a better player and able to defeat Elfride rather easily, she can only win his respect by being gracious in defeat, but since admitting defeat is for her a sign of not being in control, she finds herself in the same sort of frustrated cycle that informs her progress throughout the novel. That Elfride forfeits control after losing this latest series of games both harkens back to the failure of

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<sup>23</sup>The reader will recognize that Elfride's appeals to Knight foreshadow her encounter with Mrs. Jethway, in which she will again prove ineffective in manipulating her opponent.

<sup>24</sup>Elfride appears to recognize that she is not the player she has been led to believe: "Although her father and the narrator both call Elfride a good player, they assume that she cannot genuinely compete at chess, and that the limits on her skill derive from her womanhood...Good enough to beat the men in her small provincial circle, Elfride is expected to lose to any male player (short of a beginner like Stephen) from the metropolis" (Rimmer 207-8).

the aborted marriage plans and looks forward to her eventual collapse when Knight rejects her.<sup>25</sup>

The principal quality in Elfride's chess play that informs her relationship with Knight is her tendency to miscalculate. She makes profound errors of judgment in the various games she plays with him, and these cause her to experience feelings of dejection and humiliation. On the morning after their final chess game, Elfride asks to look at a book in which Knight is making notations, only to discover that it contains a passage in which she is rather pompously critiqued:

Girl gets into her teens, and her self-consciousness is born. After a certain interval passed in infantine helplessness, it begins to act. Simple, young, and inexperienced at first. Person of observation can tell to a nicety how old this consciousness is by the skill it has acquired in the art necessary to its success—the art of hiding itself. Generally begins career by actions which are popularly termed showing-off. (171)

Elfride is desperate for validation and the sense of control and security it engenders, even if these things come from someone whose opinions concerning young women have their basis in theoretical assumptions that have not been adequately tested by practical experience.<sup>26</sup> Elfride constructs a game in which she attempts to control Knight's

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<sup>25</sup>Her loss of control also recalls Stephen's passionate outburst after Elfride crushes him in the final game of their match.

<sup>26</sup>A connection can be made here between Henry and Stephen, since both men can be seen to suffer from the condition of having too much theoretical knowledge and too little practical experience. This is true not only with respect to chess, but more significantly, with respect to women and the conduct of romantic attachments:

Knight leant back in his chair. 'Now though I know her thoroughly as she exists in your heart, Stephen, I don't know her in the flesh. All I want to ask is, is this idea of going to India based entirely upon a belief in her fidelity?'

'Yes; I should not go if it were not for her.'

responses to a series of questions designed to flatter her, but his consistent failure to fall in with her scheme symbolically reinforces the gradual breakdown of the larger game in which she participates. After Knight makes an incorrect guess at Elfride's age, he is asked if he prefers women who seem older or younger than they really are. Of course, he plays a move she was not expecting by responding: "'Off-hand I should be inclined to say those who seem older'" (173). Elfride miscalculates yet again when she asks Knight to tell her his favourite colour of hair and he admits to favouring dark: "It was impossible for any man not to know the colour of Elfride's hair. In women who wear it plainly such a feature may be overlooked by men not given to ocular intentness. But hers was always the same way. You saw her hair as far as you could see her sex, and

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'Well, my boy, you have put me in rather an awkward position. If I give my true sentiments, I shall hurt your feelings; if I don't, I shall hurt my own judgment. And remember, I don't know much about women.'

'But you have had attachments, although you tell me very little about them.'

'And I only hope you'll continue to prosper till I tell you more.'

Stephen winced at this rap. 'I have never formed a deep attachment,' continued Knight. 'I have never found a woman worth it. Nor have I been once engaged to be married.'

'You write as if you had been engaged a hundred times, if I may be allowed to say so,' Stephen said in an injured tone.

'Yes, that may be. But, my dear Stephen, it is only those who half know a thing that write about it. Those who know it thoroughly don't take the trouble. All I know about women, or men either, is a mass of generalities. I plod along, and occasionally lift my eyes and skim the weltering surface of mankind lying between me and the horizon, as a crow might; no more.' (130)

This final image fits in particularly well with the chess motif: Knight outlines his approach to understanding other people as a player might describe how he applies general principles in surveying the board in front of him.

knew that it was the palest brown. She perceived that Knight, being perfectly aware of this, had an independent standard of admiration in the matter" (174). Elfride's miscalculation not only stems from Knight's inability to respond correctly, but in her own willingness to break herself down into disembodied parts for him to fetishize and critique simultaneously:

Elfride was thoroughly vexed. She could not but be struck with the honesty of his opinions, and the worst of it was, that the more they went against her, the more she respected them. And now like a reckless gambler, she hazarded her last and best treasure. Her eyes; they were her all now.

‘What coloured eyes do you like best, Mr. Knight?’ she said slowly.

‘Honestly, or as a compliment?’

‘Of course honestly; I don't want anybody's compliment!’

And yet Elfride knew otherwise: that a compliment or word of approval from that man then would have been like a well to a famished Arab.

‘I prefer hazel,’ he said serenely.

She had played and lost again. (174)

The image of Elfride as a gambler is an appropriate one, and points to an acute problem both in her ability to play chess and to apply this strategic knowledge in her relationships with men. Gambling in a chess game is regarded as foolish unless it can be justified by a consideration of the position, but Elfride is desperate to know whether or not she can win the respect of someone as intelligent and indifferent as Henry: "As matters stood, Stephen's admiration might have its root in a blindness the result of passion. Perhaps any keen man's judgment was condemnatory of her" (175).

The game of indifference which Elfride herself played during her courtship with Stephen, and of which Henry now shows himself to be her master, continues during their walk after one of Swancourt's services. Elfride wants him to describe the difference

between "women with something and women with nothing in them" (178), but once again the straightforwardness of his answer confounds her and throws her on the defensive:

'I knew a man who had a young friend in whom he was much interested; in fact, they were going to be married. She was seemingly poetical, and he offered her a choice of two editions of British poets, which she pretended to want badly. He said, "Which of them would you like best for me to send?" She said, "A pair of the prettiest ear-rings in Bond Street, if you don't mind, would be nicer than either." Now I call her a girl with not much in her but vanity; and so do you I daresay.'

'O yes,' replied Elfride with an effort. (178-79)

Elfride believes that she finally has Knight in a position to admit his admiration for her feminine qualities, not simply for her enjoyment of music which indeed he compliments, but what this implies about her inner nature. However, when Knight brings up the subject of the earrings, it is as though Elfride once again finds herself sitting across a chessboard from him and watching as he slowly reveals to her the instability of her position: "'No, no, no, no!' she cried petulantly; 'I didn't mean what you think. I like the music best, only I like—' 'Ear-rings better—own it!' he said in a teasing tone. 'Well, I think I should have had the moral courage to own it at once, without pretending to an elevation I could not reach.' As is said of the French soldiery, Elfride was at her worst when on the defensive" (179-80).

Perhaps the most powerful scene in the novel, and one which further helps us to understand the importance of Hardy's chess motif, is Knight's near death upon the Cliff Without a Name and Elfride's ingenious rescue of him using a rope fashioned out of her own undergarments.<sup>27</sup> In the early moments of their predicament, Elfride claims that she

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<sup>27</sup>Perhaps nowhere else in literature has a writer more graphically depicted the chess adage that "A Knight on the rim is grim" (See Appendix 3).

anticipated this calamity while on the church tower, revealing her psychic ability to recognize the future repetition of events but not to prevent these events from taking place. Furthermore, her penchant for miscalculation, which is fatal to her play at chess with Henry, nearly proves fatal to him when she fails to secure every link in the rope she fashions to save him:

‘Now,’ said Knight, who, watching the proceedings intently, had by this time not only grasped her scheme, but reasoned further on, ‘I can hold three minutes longer yet. And do you use the time in testing the strength of the knots, one by one.’

She at once obeyed, tested each singly by putting her foot on the rope between each knot, and pulling with her hands. One of the knots slipped.

‘O, think! It would have broken but for your forethought,’ Elfride exclaimed apprehensively. (214)

The reader also recognizes in this scene, as in others, that the calamities which befall the male characters typically pose an even more serious threat to Elfride, and that here as in her chess games it is she who is the most vulnerable. Her aborted elopement with Stephen certainly confuses and upsets the young architect but it threatens to destroy her once this knowledge becomes the possession of Mrs. Jethway. Similarly, although Knight appears to face certain death upon the cliff, it is Elfride who must physically and symbolically render herself vulnerable if she is to save him:

An overwhelming rush of exultation at having delivered the man she revered from one of the most terrible forms of death, shook the gentle girl to the centre of her soul. It merged in a defiance of duty to Stephen, and a total recklessness as to plighted faith. Every nerve of her will was now in entire subjection to her feeling--volition as a guiding power had forsaken her. To remain passive, as she remained now, encircled by his arms, was a sufficiently complete result--a glorious crown to all the years of her life. Perhaps he was only grateful, and did not love her. No matter; it was infinitely more to be even the slave of the greater than the queen of the less. (215-16)

Elfride's seemingly autonomous action of using her own clothes to rescue Knight is undercut both by her failure to secure the rope properly without his assistance and the sexually vulnerable position in which she leaves herself: "'I--think I--must leave you now,' she said, her face doubling its red, with an expression between gladness and shame...Elfride had absolutely nothing between her and the weather but her diaphanous exterior robe or 'costume'" (216). Like a queen forced to defend her king, Elfride is able to perform the task admirably, but not without ultimately assuming the greatest risk.

#### 3.4. The Transition to the Endgame

The episode that marks the transition to the novel's endgame and acutely foreshadows its grim denouement is the meeting that takes place among Stephen, Henry, and Elfride in the Luxellian tomb. This scene has a great deal of symbolic value because it represents the one and only meeting of all three central characters; they are reunited in this very tomb at the end of the novel, but Elfride is of course dead. Her recitation from the book of Psalms in the current episode is most telling: "'My days, just hastening to their end, / Are like an evening shade; / My beauty doth, like wither'd grass, / With waning lustre fade'" (257). This scene also demonstrates both Elfride's ability to deceive Knight and his own penchant for self-deception, and thus it serves to reveal why Elfride is able to maintain her destructive cycle of secrecy. Knight is convinced that the sight of death in the Luxellian tomb has turned Elfride pale, and she is content in allowing him to assume this: "His obtuseness to the cause of her indisposition, by evidencing his entire freedom from the suspicion of anything behind the scenes, showed how incapable Knight was of deception himself, rather than any inherent dulness in him regarding human

nature. This, clearly perceived by Elfride, added poignancy to her self-reproach, and she idolized him the more because of their difference" (261). Knight may be incapable of intentionally deceiving others, but he deceives himself rather easily, trusting that odd behaviour on Elfride's part can not have any sinister implications because of the faith he places in her sexual innocence.<sup>28</sup> His manner in dealing with others is straightforward; in chess terms, he seems more the rook than a knight, since among chess pieces the last is by far the most deceptive. However, like the knight, he unwittingly manages to leap over Stephen and "wriggle" into his romantic affairs. During his encounter with Stephen in the Luxellian tomb, Knight lands on a square directly between his Queen and her pawn: "It was a scene which was remembered by all three as an indelible mark in their history. Knight, with an abstracted face, was standing between his companions, though a little in advance of them, Elfride being on his right hand, and Stephen Smith on his left" (255). Rimmer observes that "Knight's name, in its connections with knighthood and with chess, emphasizes his position as an insider in a world that excludes Stephen, and that Elfride can enter only as the passive "lady" whom the knight defends against others and himself besieges for sexual favours" (Rimmer 207). However, Knight is not only the stuffy modernized version of the chivalrous and trustworthy knight, but also a self-deceiving interloper who manages to come between others and their games because he expects them to be playing by the same set of rules he religiously follows.

Although Knight can not help Elfride to break out of the frustrating cycle that

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<sup>28</sup>This certainly recalls Swancourt's earlier conversation with Elfride when they "hypothetically" discuss what would happen if she were to marry Stephen, all without Swancourt having the faintest inkling that such a plan could be carried out.

prevents her happiness because of his penchant for self-deception and inability to see past his rigid convictions, Elfride herself is paralyzed by a constant need to hide the truth from him. For instance, although Elfride's experience inside the Luxellian tomb and the "intense agony of reproach in Stephen's eye" (260) when she leaves with Knight prompt her to reveal the previous attachment to her new lover (the reader will recall that Elfride is careful to set a specific time for her confession and to demand of Knight that he keep her to her word), she is ultimately unable to go through with it:

The moment had been too much for her. Now that the crisis had come, no qualms of conscience, no love of honesty, no yearning to make a confidence and obtain forgiveness with a kiss, could string Elfride up to the venture. Her dread lest he should be unforgiving was heightened by the thought of yesterday's artifice, which might possibly add disgust to his disappointment. The certainty of one more day's affection, which she gained by silence, outvalued the hope of a perpetuity combined with the risk of all. (263-64)

Like a chess player who feels forced into distracting her opponent from a weakness rather than rectifying it, only to see the weakness become irreparable, Elfride declines revealing the truth to Knight because she fails to recognize that her secret is not a static thing, and that it grows over time into something over which she has no control.<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, Elfride soon runs into Mrs. Jethway, the enemy Queen, and wants nothing more than an

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<sup>29</sup>The flaw in Elfride's strategy of secrecy is that it has to be permanently maintained; otherwise, not only will she be damned by the secret she keeps, but by the deception she has employed to keep the knowledge of her aborted elopement from Knight: "what would he [Knight] say did he know all, and see it as Mrs. Jethway saw it? He would never make her the happiest girl in the world by taking her to be his own for aye. The thought enclosed her as a tomb whenever it presented itself to her perturbed brain. She tried to believe that Mrs. Jethway would never do her such a cruel wrong as to increase the bad appearance of her folly by innuendoes; and concluded that concealment, having been begun, must be persisted in, if possible. For what he might consider as bad as the fact, was her previous concealment of it by strategy" (293).

quick exchange to remove herself from the game:

‘I defy you!’ cried Elfride tempestuously. ‘Do and say all you can to ruin me; try; put your tongue at work; I invite it! I defy you as a slanderous woman! Look, there he comes.’ And her voice trembled greatly as she saw through the leaves the beloved form of Knight coming from the door with her hat in his hand ‘Tell him at once; I can bear it.’

‘Not now,’ said the woman, and disappeared down the path. (266-67)

Mrs. Jethway understands that a “queen exchange” is not necessarily to her benefit, and that more damage can be done to Elfride by keeping the secret hidden from Knight until the proper moment.<sup>30</sup>

A similar scene is replayed soon after when Henry and Elfride travel with her family by boat from London to Plymouth and the mysterious Mrs. Jethway apparently comes aboard. Elfride’s sleep is haunted on two separate occasions by the threats of her nemesis and she makes every effort to stay out of the dark lady’s path. Once again, Knight fails to recognize the source of Elfride’s moments of disquiet, assuming that they result from the manner of travel rather than any sort of emotional upset. However, while the previous episode shows how Elfride’s problems continue to develop because of her deception, the current scene shows what happens when she is plagued by all of the strategic weaknesses that inform her play at chess, most specifically her tendencies to overestimate and miscalculate. Just as Elfride makes serious errors of judgment in her

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<sup>30</sup>A rule of thumb in chess is that a player who is on the attack does not want to exchange pieces, especially queens, because he or she thereby reduces the number of pieces that can be brought to bear on the opponent’s position. Similarly, a defender welcomes exchanges since they tend to make the position less complicated. Mrs. Jethway could reveal the secret to Knight during this scene, and effectively remove both herself and Elfride from the “game,” but she wants to do more than spoil Elfride’s relationship—she wants to inflict injury on her opponent—and so she holds off on an exchange until the last possible opportunity.

chess games with Knight and then symbolically repeats them when she tries to have him admit his admiration for her physical beauty, she repeats them yet again in questioning Knight about his previous romantic involvements:

‘I wanted to ask you,’ she went on, ‘if--you had ever been engaged before.’ She added tremulously, ‘I hope you have--I mean, I don’t mind at all if you have.’

‘No, I never was,’ Knight instantly and heartily replied. ‘Elfride’--and there was a certain happy pride in his tone--‘I am twelve years older than you, and I have been about the world, and, in a way, into society, and you have not. And yet I am not so unfit for you as strict-thinking people might imagine, who would assume the difference in age to signify most surely an equal addition to my practice in love-making.’

Elfride shivered...The belief which had been her sheet anchor in hoping for forgiveness had proved false. (283-84)

Elfride thinks that she can best Knight at chess during their match, and now she believes that reducing him to her level by making him admit to previous indiscretions will provide her with the opportunity to reveal the truth about her past: “‘Whenever I find you have done a foolish thing I am glad, because it seems to bring you a little nearer to me, who have done many’” (287-88). Naturally, her strategy backfires because Knight is a romantic novice. Perhaps most importantly, however, tied in with Elfride’s penchant for secrecy and tendency to miscalculate is a combination of hero-worship and self-loathing that ultimately prevents her from ever recognizing herself as Knight’s equal.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>In the opening moments of the following chapter, the narrative makes clear the impossibility of Elfride seeing herself as anything but Knight’s pawn: “The unreserved girl was never chary of letting her lover discover how much she admired him. She never once held an idea in opposition to his, or insisted on any point with him, or showed any independence, or held her own on any subject. His lightest whim she respected and obeyed as law, and if, expressing her opinion on a matter, he took up the subject and differed from her, she instantly threw down her own opinion as wrong and untenable. Even her ambiguities and *espieglerie* were but media of the same manifestation; acted charades, embodying the words of her prototype, the tender and susceptible daughter-in-

As in the gradual exchange of pieces on a chessboard leading to the bare bones of an endgame, Knight eventually begins the arduous process of removing the layers of guilt and deception that clothe Elfride's secret about her previous romantic involvement with Stephen. Knight may be able to defeat Elfride time and time again at chess, but his ability to uncover her strategies quickly over the board does not manifest itself in the context of their relationship. Not only does it take Knight a considerable time to learn the extent to which Elfride will go in playing her game of secrecy, he also misjudges her honesty and guilt when he assumes she is not a virgin.

Elfride's journey with Stephen to the cliffs beyond Targan Bay is now repeated with Knight as her new travel partner; however, the chess-like repetition of events reinforces not so much how these parallel episodes are the same, but rather how much circumstances have altered. Once again the pair travel to Windy Beak, with Elfride riding her horse while her lover walks beside her, but as the narrator remarks: "how different [was] the mood from that of the former time. She had, indeed, given up her position as queen of the less to be vassal of the greater. Here was no showing off now; no scampering out of sight with Pansy, to perplex and tire her companion; no saucy remarks on *La belle dame sans merci*. Elfride was burdened by the very intensity of her

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law of Naomi: 'Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid'" (289). Because Elfride can not see herself as Knight's equal, she is unable to achieve any measure of autonomy, and thus her efforts to find happiness are undercut by the very means she uses in attempting to bring this happiness about: "Elfride's docile devotion to Knight was now its own enemy. Clinging to him so dependently, she taught him in time to presume upon that devotion—a lesson men are not slow to learn. A slight rebelliousness occasionally would have done him no harm, and would have been a world of advantage to her. But she idolized him, and was proud to be his bondservant" (298).

love" (300). Elfride finds herself in the predicament of a chess player who recognizes that although a series of moves has brought about a position similar to one which previously existed, certain subtle differences in the new position render it unplayable.

### 3.5. The Endgame Proper

The novel's endgame is signalled by the elimination of the Black Queen when the Church Tower comes crashing down on Mrs. Jethway. Hardy marks the transition by colouring the scene with chessic tones, not only in the symbolic capture of Rook (Tower) takes Queen and in the latter's removal from the "board," but in the description of Mrs. Jethway's house: "The fire was out, but the moonlight entered the quarried window, and made patterns upon the floor" (318). Knight's initial discovery of the body is ironic on a number of levels and serves as a kind of symbolic display of how he uncovers things (like Elfride's secret elopement) slowly by degrees:

'It is a tressy species of moss or lichen,' he said to himself.  
 But it lay loosely over the stone.  
 'It is a tuft of grass,' he said.  
 But it lacked the roughness and humidity of the finest grass.  
 'It is a mason's whitewash-brush.'  
 Such brushes, he remembered, were more bristly; and however  
 much used in repairing a structure would not be required in pulling one  
 down.  
 He said, 'It must be a thready silk fringe.'  
 He felt further in. It was somewhat warm. Knight instantly felt  
 somewhat cold. (315)

Knight has a theoretical knowledge about certain matters which has never adequately been tested by practical experience, and here he must actually touch Mrs. Jethway in order to convince himself that a human being lies pinned underneath the Tower.

Now that this major piece is removed from the field of play, the game enters it

final stages presumably with a distinct edge for the "White pieces." After all, Mrs. Jethway's death prompts Knight to think about his state of affairs with Elfride and to consider an immediate union instead of continued procrastination:

The unutterable melancholy of the whole scene, as he waited on, silent and alone, did not altogether clash with the mood of Knight, even though he was the affianced of a fair and winning girl, and though so lately he had been in her company. Whilst sitting on the remains of the demolished tower he had defined a new sensation; that the lengthened course of inaction he had lately been indulging in on Elfride's account might probably not be good for him as a man who had work to do. It could quickly be put an end to by hastening on his marriage with her. (319-20)

However, in typical Hardyian fashion, the episode provides the means by which Knight gains access to Mrs. Jethway's residence and discovers that she has been earnestly endeavouring to compose an important letter. Thus, on the following day when he receives by post both this letter and Elfride's self-incriminating one, Knight is emotionally devastated.

When Henry discovers the "truth" about Elfride's past and concludes that his affections have been trifled with, his protective layer of self-deception is dispelled. Like Swancourt, who performs an immediate about-face when he learns of Stephen's humble origins, Knight's conviction about Elfride's innocence transforms itself into an even stronger conviction of her guilt: "It is a melancholy thought that men who at first will not allow the verdict of perfection they pronounce upon their sweethearts or wives to be disturbed by God's own testimony to the contrary, will, once suspecting their purity, morally hang them upon evidence they would be ashamed to admit in judging a dog" (326). Knight finds himself in the same kind of position that Stephen does after his humiliating loss to Elfride in the final game of their chess match, when his previous wins

against her are revealed to be nothing more than games of pity on her part. Knight's violent reaction can be understood in chess terms, for when a player believes that a particular position is favourable, only to have this belief shattered by an unexpected move from the opponent, the player's perception of the resulting position is often far more negative than it ought to be.<sup>32</sup>

Literary scholars have frequently criticized the fact that Elfride disappears from the last six chapters of the novel (she undergoes a kind of promotion by castling with the novel's resident rook, Lord Luxellian) and that Hardy's narrative turns to an examination of what happens to Knight after he leaves Endelstow. They argue that Elfride's premature death makes the story anticlimactic, and occasionally suggest that it constitutes a disturbing kind of practical joke on Hardy's part. However, as Rimmer has noted, Elfride's early death is consistent with the novel's controlling chess motif, because if she is associated with the queen in the game, Elfride is as expendable as any other piece excepting the king: "Her relations with Knight and with Stephen, it seems, have progressively reduced her to the immobility suggested by the disembodied 'pair of blue eyes' in the book's title, and like a captured queen in chess, she is put aside while the game she has seemed central to goes on without her" (215). The King is the only piece that can not be sacrificed or otherwise given up because it must remain on the board throughout the entire game. Thus it is not surprising that in the final scene, Stephen,

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<sup>32</sup>This is also true in a reverse way in the case of a position that goes from worse to better. Frequently, when a player has had to endure a poor position for a long time and then finally succeeds in righting the game, he or she will only be too glad to accept a draw, even when an objective view of the position suggests that the player is now clearly winning.

Henry, and Lord Luxellian—men of differing social classes who have nonetheless been at one time or another the "king" in Elfride's life—are left to look on at their sacrificed queen.

#### 4. Conclusion

In *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Hardy incorporates his chess motif in such a way that he shows his novel to be a complex and evolving game universe replete with conflicts and cross-purposed goals which the metaphorical implications of orthodox chess illuminate rather than simply replace. The world of the novel is not merely an elaborate chess game, but a disturbing mix of order and disorder, strategy and tactics, growth and decay, winning and losing, fate and circumstance, which all combine to simulate an unorthodox game involving not only human characters but non-human entities as well. Hardy's characters are much more developed than, for example, Middleton's allegorical chess pieces in *A Game at Chess*, and although a character like Mrs. Jethway is for the most part a one-dimensional combination of grief, vengeance, and malevolence, other characters are not so easy to classify. Stephen is Elfride's pawn, but being first in her heart he is also to some degree her king. Knight is the chivalrous knight, the straight-dealing medieval rook, the romantic pawn of Elfride's game of deception and the king of her affections. Even the consistently characterized Swancourt is at once a pawn, a king, and a bad bishop struggling to become better.

At the centre of all of this is Elfride, a character whose efforts to find happiness are frustrated because the means she uses to free herself from the forces that keep her in check are the ones that ultimately paralyze her. Hardy's use of the chess motif reminds

us that although Elfride is brought down by her deceptions, she is a product of her education in social game-playing at the hands of Swancourt, and of the unspoken but understood social conventions that limit and devalue her as a Victorian woman. Hardy carefully traces Elfride's history in terms of the forces that strive to define and control her, and expresses through the chess metaphor the idea that her struggle against this control is as noble as it is ultimately futile.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Truth about Pawn Promotion: Chess and the Search for Autonomy in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. A Critical Introduction to the Chess Problem

As the chess problem...has puzzled some of my readers, it may be well to explain that it is correctly worked out, so far as the *moves* are concerned.<sup>2</sup> The *alternation* of Red and White is perhaps not so strictly observed as it might be, and the 'castling' of the three Queens is merely a way of saying that they entered the palace: but the 'check' of the White King at move 6, the capture of the Red Knight at move 7, and the final 'checkmate' of the Red King, will be found, by any one who will take the trouble to set the pieces and play the moves as directed, to be strictly in accordance with the laws of the game.

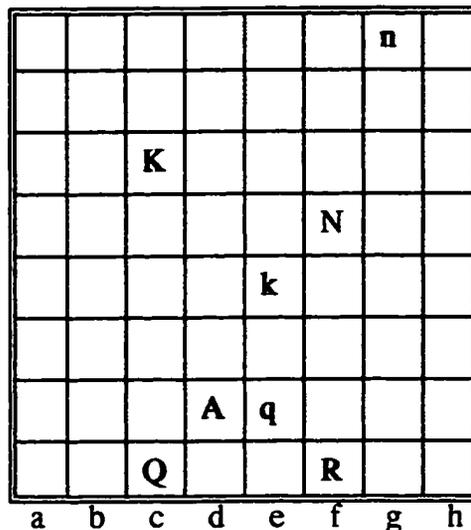
--From the Christmas 1896 Preface

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<sup>1</sup>This chapter represents a continuation and development of the ideas expressed in my M.A. thesis, *Theoretical Checkmating: An Analysis of the Manner in which the Chess Problem in Through the Looking-Glass Resists and Subverts Critical Interpretations of the Novel's Chess Motif* (McMaster University, 1992). On the following page is a version of the diagram of Carroll's chess problem as it appears at the beginning of *Through the Looking-Glass*. The diagram shows the position of the chessmen before the commencement of the game: the White pieces are indicated by uppercase letters and the Red pieces by lowercase letters (note that N=kNight). This format is consistent throughout the chapter. For a detailed description of algebraic notation and general chess terminology, please see Appendices 1 and 2.

<sup>2</sup>Carroll lists the moves that constitute the solution to the Looking-Glass chess problem as though they represent the moves of two opposing forces (i.e. the White side and the Red side). However, a closer scrutiny of these moves reveals that they are distinguished on the basis of whether they are made by Alice or by one of the other characters in the chess game (except, of course, for the seventh moves, which are both made by the White Knight). As will be discussed later in the chapter, not all of these moves represent physical movements across the chessboard that conform to the established rules of orthodox chess. For instance, Alice's first, third, ninth, and tenth moves are not chess moves at all, but represent moments where she either meets one of the two Queens, becomes a Queen herself (her movement to the Eighth Square and her transformation into a Queen are listed as two separate moves), or castles with the Queens prior to her coronation feast.

R E D



W H I T E

*White Pawn (Alice) to play, and win in eleven moves.*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ALICE MEETS R.Q.</li> <li>2. ALICE THROUGH Q'S<br/>3D (<i>by railway</i>)<br/>TO Q'S 4TH (<i>Tweedle-</i><br/><i>dum and Tweedledee</i>)</li> <li>3. ALICE MEETS W. Q.<br/>(<i>with shawl</i>)</li> <li>4. ALICE TO Q'S 5TH<br/>(<i>shop, river, shop</i>)</li> <li>5. ALICE TO Q'S 6TH<br/>(<i>Humpty Dumpty</i>)</li> <li>6. ALICE TO Q'S 7TH<br/>(<i>forest</i>)</li> <li>7. W. KT. TAKES R. KT.</li> <li>8. ALICE TO Q'S 8TH<br/>(<i>coronation</i>)</li> <li>9. ALICE BECOMES QUEEN</li> <li>10. ALICE CASTLES<br/>(<i>feast</i>)</li> <li>11. ALICE TAKES R. Q.<br/>AND WINS</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. R. Q. TO K. R'S 4TH</li> <li>2. W. Q. TO Q. B'S 4TH<br/>(<i>after shawl</i>)</li> <li>3. W. Q. TO Q. B'S 5TH<br/>(<i>becomes sheep</i>)</li> <li>4. W. Q. TO K. B'S 8TH<br/>(<i>leaves egg on shelf</i>)</li> <li>5. W. Q. TO Q. B'S 8TH<br/>(<i>flying from R. Kt.</i>)</li> <li>6. R. KT. TO K'S 2ND (CH.)</li> <li>7. W. KT. TO K. B'S 5TH</li> <li>8. R. Q. TO K'S SQ.<br/>(<i>examination</i>)</li> <li>9. QUEENS CASTLE</li> <li>10. W. Q. TO Q. R'S 6TH<br/>(<i>soup</i>)</li> </ol> |
|---|---|

Figure 1. The Solution to Carroll's Looking-Glass Chess Problem

When Lewis Carroll wrote the sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, he replaced the loose motif of the card game with a much more pervasive chess metaphor. Indeed, Carroll went to the extent of formulating both a chess problem and its detailed solution as the structural basis for the plot of *Through the Looking-Glass*. Unlike *Wonderland*, where Alice merely encounters characters that serve as representations of playing cards and the like, the *Looking-Glass* gameworld is structured around a chess problem whose solution is played out by several of the inhabitants. In the game, Alice proceeds from her starting square to the eighth rank, where she promotes to a Queen and checkmates the Red King by capturing his Queen and shaking her into a kitten.

While its use of a chess game in charting the difficult "journeys" faced by Alice links *Through the Looking-Glass* with the other novels that we have been discussing, the text also shares a number of striking similarities with Thomas Middleton's political allegory, *A Game at Chess*. Like Carroll's novel, Middleton's play contains actual chess characters who compete against one another and the opposing "House," with the White side ultimately gaining victory over its opponent through a checkmate by discovery. In addition, just as *Through the Looking-Glass* contains characters like the Goat, the Paper Man, and the Gnat who are not listed as part of the chess problem, *A Game at Chess* also features characters who are not strictly part of the game, such as Ignatius and Error who introduce the contest in the Induction, or the Fat Bishop who first appears in the Second Act. Finally, the chess game in each work can be interpreted both as social satire and political allegory, with the actions of the chess characters suggesting the absurd, ingenuous, or underhanded dealings of their real-life types or counterparts.

Despite sharing these fundamental similarities, *Through the Looking-Glass* and *A Game at Chess* have a number of far more interesting differences, each of which helps the critical reader to understand how Carroll's approach to the chess metaphor is subversive. For instance, by using Red and White pieces, Carroll avoids creating a Black and White (Good and Evil) binary opposition—a concept which is vital to Middleton's allegorical depiction of the struggle between Roman Catholicism and English Protestantism—and therefore refrains from limiting the implications of his chess game in this way. Indeed, even a cursory examination of the Looking-Glass chessmen suggests that although some are rather stern (the Red Queen) and others quite friendly (the White Knight), none of the chess characters is overtly benevolent or sinister.<sup>3</sup>

Another fundamental difference between the two works is that while Middleton's play does not attempt to render an actual game of chess or reconstruct and play out a particular position, the plot of *Through the Looking-Glass* is based on the solution to the diagrammed chess problem given at the novel's outset. In his critical introduction to *A Game at Chess* (1993), T. H. Howard-Hill has noted that Middleton was far more

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<sup>3</sup>Critics have noted, however, that the characters associated with the White side in Carroll's *Dramatis Personae* tend to be more pleasant than those associated with the Red side. This is certainly true of the chess pieces currently operating in the game: the Red Queen is sensible but austere and the White Queen is bumbling but sweet; the Red Knight tries to capture Alice and the White Knight successfully rescues her; the Red King is asleep but potentially threatening and the White King is awake and rather obliging. The characters making up the remainder of the Red and White sides tend to be assigned their places on the basis of general charisma. Thus, characters like the Aged Man, the Unicorn, the Fawn, and Haigha and Hatta are associated with the White camp, while Humpty Dumpty, the Lion, the Rose, the Walrus and the Carpenter are associated with the Red camp. However, Carroll's chess fiction does not contain a character like Middleton's Black Bishop Pawn, the nefarious Jesuit figure who attempts both a spiritual and sexual seduction of the White Queen's Pawn.

interested in the implications of his chess characters and what they represented allegorically than in any significance attached to how their various movements might illustrate an orthodox chess game:

...conventions of chess were used just so long as it suited Middleton's purposes. The spectator's understanding should be prompted by the play rather than by his or her knowledge of chess. Harper (p. 10) detects in the first scene a Queen's Pawn gambit declined, but play breaks down when the Black Knight's Pawn and his master enter successively. The spectators were not invited to play chess mentally as they watched. Chess is used not so much as a device to control the play's action as a sustained metaphor through which the allegory was elaborated. (Howard-Hill 36)

However, Carroll is very interested in having his readers play through an actual (albeit unorthodox) chess problem as they read, and he also challenges us to participate in a number of other Looking-Glass games. Whereas Middleton has his critical audience engaged in speculating about the relationship between chess and life, and trying to discover which of the Black and White pieces represent particular political figures of the day, Carroll explores the very nature of the rules that define how, why, and with whom we play.

A debate that began to surface soon after Carroll's publication of the second Alice novel is whether or not the chess problem itself makes any sense as a game, and whether its incoherence can be reasonably justified. The lack of alternating turns between the two sides and the apparent discordance among the movements of the various pieces led Falconer Madan, in *A Handbook of the Literature of the Rev. C. L. Dodgson* (1931), to criticize rather sharply Carroll's handling of the chess problem:

With all this parade it was proper that the game should proceed in chess style, and in later editions a special preface claims that the problem 'is correctly worked out, so far as the *moves* are concerned', and excuses

some irregularities, but declares that there is a normal check-mate (whereas there is no attempt at one).

But in spite of this explanation the chess framework is full of absurdities and impossibilities, and it is unfortunate that Dodgson did not display his usual dexterity by bringing the game, as a game, up to chess standard...He might have searched for a printed problem to suit his story, or have made one. But he allows the White side to make nine consecutive moves (!): he allows Alice (a White pawn) reaching the eighth square, and Alice becoming a Queen, to be two separate moves: he allows the White King to be checked without either side taking any notice of the fact: he allows two Queens to castle (!): he allows the White Queen to fly from the Red Knight, when she could take it. Hardly a move has a sane purpose, from the point of view of chess. (62)

This sort of reductive criticism suggests that Madan knew enough about chess to understand that Carroll was manipulating the traditional rules of the game, but not enough about literature to recognize that this manipulation was crucial to the point the author was trying to make about Victorian society and the place of little girls, like Alice, within it. Carroll's fervent desire to show off his manipulation of an ordered system like chess is consistent with his penchant for manipulating other types of ordered systems, of which literature is, for our purposes, the most significant example. Madan evidently perceived Carroll's inability to incorporate a traditional chess game into his novel as evidence of some sort of artistic failure, when in fact the use of a normal chess game would have undermined not only the novel's artistry, but the important thematic implications that Carroll's text yields under critical examination.

A more successful early attempt to understand the chess problem can be found in Alexander Taylor's *The White Knight: A Study of C. L. Dodgson* (1952). Here, the critic makes a very perceptive and convincing argument about the condition of being a pawn in the Looking-Glass chess game:

In the first place it would be illogical to expect logic in a game of chess dreamed by a child. It would be still more illogical for a pawn, which can only see a small patch of the board to understand the meaning of its experiences. And there is a moral in that. This is a pawn's impression of chess, which is like a human being's impression of life...To understand one's part in a game of chess, one would have to be aware of the room and the unseen intelligence which is combining the pieces. Deprived of such knowledge, the chess-men have to explain things as best they can. (101-2)

Taylor's argument suggests that there must be a way of looking at the chess problem which does not involve seeing it as a contest between two opposing players, because otherwise the game "would be tantamount to a confession that he believed in two separate and opposite powers above us" (102). However, if the merits of Taylor's assertions partially rest in his bold style of approaching the chess problem, then this boldness is also his undoing, for it prevents him from being more receptive to certain textual possibilities. For instance, he claims that Carroll "was not interested in the game as a game, but in the implications of the moves" (101), as though the author's use of an unorthodox game was evidence that he was not interested in it, on some level, for its own sake. However, Carroll was the last person not to be interested in a game as a game, regardless of his obvious interest in what the game implied. Also, Taylor states that "Alice never grasps the purpose of the game at all," noting that "when she reaches the Eighth Square she tries to find out from the Queens if it is over" (101). However, if Alice is unsure about whether the chess game ends with her promotion, she certainly has more than an inkling during the latter stages of her coronation feast that the larger game in which she has become involved has a purpose that is, at the very least, disturbing. Finally, although Taylor takes Madan to task for criticizing the unorthodox nature of the chess problem--for

worrying about the game as a game—he attempts to devise his own corrective strategy for dealing with the problem of the White King being left in check: "There is therefore something very like a checkmate and a fairly complicated one. The only objection is that the White King must have been in check while the White Queen moved to Q. R. 6th (soup) at Move 10. On the other hand, when Alice was on the Seventh Square she was still a pawn. The White King was behind her and if he had moved to Q. B. 5th she would not have known and he would not have been in check" (105). Here, Taylor seems to forget his own advice of not worrying about the game as a game.

Taylor's interpretation of the chess problem has little to do with Alice's symbolic journey from innocence to experience; instead, he suggests that the novel is a form of religious allegory in which, for instance, Tweedledum and Tweedledee represent the High and Low Church, and where the novel's final scene sees "chess and theology flow together towards the climax" (142). However, to impose this allegorical interpretation on the text is to reduce it in much the same manner that Humpty Dumpty reduces "Jabberwocky" by idiosyncratically defining each of its terms. Taylor does not give enough consideration to Alice's importance *as* Alice, a young girl who eagerly makes her journey towards queenhood and the coming of age it symbolizes, only to realize what it is like when her hopes and expectations of what has been promised her are seriously undermined.

In his *Annotated Alice* (1960), Martin Gardner rightly criticizes the approach to the chess problem taken by Madan, although he himself takes the game's complexities somewhat for granted in claiming that "the mad quality of the chess game conforms to

the mad logic of the looking-glass world" (Gardner, *AA* 172). Gardner's interpretation, which he does not appear to amend in his *More Annotated Alice* (1990), is not necessarily incorrect but it is oversimplified: although he recognizes that the chess game is an extension of Looking-Glass logic, he explicitly suggests that it is a "mad" system. Gardner then continues along this line of critical observation: "It is true that both sides play an exceedingly careless game, but what else would one expect from the mad creatures behind the mirror" (*AA* 170). The flaw in Gardner's argument is that he equates madness with the condition of operating according to non-traditional principles, thus ignoring the idea that these principles contain their own logical system, even though it may only be of the Looking-Glass variety. His hypothesis does not stand up for long, however, because when he sees evidence of the game's "careless" play in the White Queen's failure to effect certain checkmates and captures, he remarks that her oversights "are in keeping with her absent-mindedness" (170), not realizing that in proposing this solution to remedy the difficulties posed by Carroll's game, he undercuts his own argument that the pieces operate according to the principles of mad logic. Finally, although Gardner briefly reflects on the tradition of writers who have used chess as a metaphor for life, he himself does not undertake to interpret the significance of Carroll's chess problem as it relates to Alice.

In "Looking-Glass Chess" (1970), Ivor Davies takes issue with the approaches of Madan, Taylor, and Gardner, contending the last "allows that the queening of Alice and the checkmate as described in the text are orthodox but despairs of a rational explanation of the other apparent violations of the rules" (189). He points to the fact that after

Carroll's death, three chess books were found in his rooms: George Walker's *Art of Chess-Play: A New Treatise on the Game of Chess* (1846), Howard Staunton's *The Chess-Player's Companion: Comprising a New Treatise on Odds, and a Collection of Games* (1849), and Staunton's *The Chess Tournament, A Collection of the Games Played at this Celebrated Assemblage* (1852). Davies's argument, later taken up by John Fisher in *The Magic of Lewis Carroll* (1973), is that the curiosities in the chess game, such as the lack of strict alternation of turns and the leaving of the White King in check, can easily be accounted for by examining certain defunct rules that Walker and Staunton discuss in their texts. Like most of the other critics discussed in this introduction, several of Davies's ideas are insightful and will resurface throughout the chapter, but my main problem with his approach is his inability to get past the notion that the game is conducted either between a White player and a Red player, or by "the casting of unseen dice by an invisible chess master" (191). These observations should not be considered as conclusions in themselves, which Davies appears content to make them, but as a means of digging deeper into the implications of the chess game in Carroll's text. Like Madan and Gardner before him, Davies makes no real effort to interpret the significance of the chess game with respect to what it suggests about the nature of Alice's dream-journey.

A rather more uncomfortable element of Davies's essay is the homage he pays to D. M. Liddell's "The Chess of Alice Through the Looking-Glass" (1910). Liddell endeavours to "improve" the chess problem by replacing it with a game of his own devising which commences with the somewhat eccentric Bird's Opening and ends sixty-six moves later with Alice's checkmate of the Red King. Liddell believes that Carroll's

Christmas 1896 Preface is an admission by the author that the chess game can be improved:

We are indeed to agree with him as to 'alternation,' for White takes eight moves in succession, enough to wipe out the entire Red force, which is scarcely to be called Chess, while the above play is not 'Alice,' because a large number of the characters she meets in the book are not to be found on the board. (qtd in Davies 189)

This corrective approach proceeds from the assumption that Carroll essentially mishandles the prefatory problem, but to adopt this premise is to dismiss the ingenuity involved in the novel's unorthodox handling of the chess game. In effect, Liddell does the exact opposite of what Gerry Forbes does some seventy-five years later in "Lewis Carroll Teaches You How to Play the Sicilian" (1986), a brief article in which its author completely disregards Carroll's prefatory chess problem and views *Through the Looking-Glass* as an informative treatise on the Sicilian Defence.<sup>4</sup>

In his lecture to the Lewis Carroll Society (1972), Denis Crutch looks closely at a number of problems associated with the chess motif in an effort to understand the author's rationale for incorporating this complex system into his novel, but some of the conclusions he reaches seem rather unsatisfactory. For instance, he endeavours to define what takes place on the Looking-Glass chessboard strictly as a game by eliminating the

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<sup>4</sup>Characterized by the moves 1. e4 c5, 2. Nf3 Nc6, 3. d4, the Sicilian Defence was in its infant stages during the time of Carroll's literary career and did not "undergo serious examination until many decades later" (Forbes 43). It is not clear that Carroll was aware of the revolutionary opening at all, for as Forbes is forced to admit: "It is possible that the only evaluation available to Mr. Dodgson was that of Paul Morphy from his annotations of the MacDonnell--Labourdonnais games" (43). Even if Carroll did know of Morphy's annotations, these were so "abruptly dismissive" as to dissuade most theorists from analyzing the Sicilian, especially through an opening treatise written in the form of a children's novel.

possibilities that it is either a problem or a demonstration:

Was what Alice joined a game, a problem, or a demonstration? Hardly a demonstration, for one thing most of the pieces are already off the board, and for another all she really learns is that a pawn moves forward from the second square and may become a Queen eventually, which she knew already; a problem? the diagram - "White pawn (Alice) to play, and win in eleven moves" - does seem to suggest this, but how much of a problem is it when all she has to do is to move straight up the board, take the opposing Queen and simultaneously checkmate? - she could hardly have done anything else! But, a game? yes, it is a game alright, and one which began quite some time before Alice arrived. (2)

The problem with Crutch's argument is that he too easily dismisses the notion that Looking-Glass chess can be something other than a game. He remarks that it can not be a demonstration because most of the pieces are missing and Alice does not really learn all that much, but how do we know how many pieces constitute a demonstration and when are we ever told *what* Alice learns about chess from her participation in the game? Similarly, Crutch argues--in Carrollian fashion--that the chess game does not constitute a problem because Alice does not have any "problem" travelling the length of the chessboard and effecting checkmate, but certainly Alice encounters a host of difficulties in trying to reach the Eighth Square. Finally, to confirm that Looking-Glass chess constitutes a game, Crutch observes that Alice enters somewhere in the middle, but the only evidence which suggests that she is joining an ongoing game is to be found in the *Dramatis Personae*, which Carroll eventually saw fit to replace with his Christmas 1896 Preface. Thus, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the activities in which Alice participates constitute a demonstration or a problem as much as they do a game. Indeed, the secret to Carroll's prefatory chess diagram is that it actively resists a single interpretive strategy.

Crutch also feels the need to correct Carroll's arrangement of some of the Red chessmen in the *Dramatis Personae*, suggesting that by moving the Lion to face the Unicorn, the Carpenter to face the Walrus, and the Crow to the King's rook square, "these three little changes will make everything right again" (1). Naturally, such a recommendation is hardly acceptable because like Madan's criticisms and Liddell's reformulation of the game, it implicitly suggests that Carroll has somehow gone wrong. Intriguing, but also somewhat puzzling is Crutch's contention that "what the players are doing is deliberately and laboriously playing the whole game backwards, principally so that Alice their visitor can join in, and at the same time, so that they may find out for themselves how it began - which of course they do not know (but we do, because Lewis Carroll has given us the solution, in Looking-Glass fashion, at the front of the book!)" (3). However, here Crutch's commentary ends and we do not learn how this assertion can be tied in with the novel's broader implications.

A. S. M. Dickins's "Alice in Fairyland" (1976) examines Carroll's chess game from the perspectives afforded by the theories of Fairy Chess, or non-traditional chess systems. Dickins attempts to systematize the solution to the Looking-Glass chess problem by suggesting that Carroll was experimenting with Fairy Chess rules and then incorporating them into his novel. He gently rebukes those who find it necessary to reflect on the violation of orthodox rules in Carroll's chess problem when the problem can be understood as "an Excelsior Series-mover Helpmate by marked pawn in 10 series moves with a double-move mating move" (Dickins 11). Dickins's thesis is that Carroll uses this strategy in order to parody traditional chess moralities in which the orthodox

rules that govern the game are shown to apply in a real-life context.

However, in criticizing approaches to the chess problem that emphasize Carroll's blatant disregard for orthodox chess, Dickins does not perceive the irony in his own attempt to subject the game to an unorthodox chess system. His essay tries to show that Carroll was exposed to the principles of Fairy Chess and therefore more likely than not to exploit them in his novel, but the evidence that exists for this kind of speculation is dubious at best. In order to convince the reader of his argument, he is frequently forced to rely on statements such as: "If he had not heard of it [the Double-move], then it is an instance of one of those ideas waiting in the skirts of the cosmos to be born and which Lewis Carroll picked up because he was tuned in telepathically to the right wave-length" (14). Like other critical attempts to understand the chess game, Dickins's Fairy Chess hypothesis does not always give enough consideration to Carroll as the grandmaster-manipulator of events on the Looking-Glass gameboard.

A consideration of the preceding approaches to the chess problem suggests that Carroll's game both elicits and subverts critical attempts to subject it to a rigorous scheme. Nonetheless, these attempts to systematize and explain the significance of chess in *Through the Looking-Glass* contribute to our understanding of the depth and originality of Carroll's artistic achievement in creating a body of criticism whose opposing theories and contradictory arguments form many of the holes and gaps that are at the heart of the novel's chess problem. One of these gaps is the general absence of literary context in previous approaches to the game. Critics often forget that the work is more than a complex chess problem, and so ignore attempts to understand the game within the broader

framework of Alice's symbolic dream-journey. This, then, becomes the point of departure for my own critical investigation.

## 2. How to Play Looking-Glass Chess

To understand the implications of Carroll's chess problem requires that we first admit the possibility of being unable to discover an incontrovertible solution to it. We may become masters, or even grandmasters, of its numerous subtleties and paradoxes, but that is not to suggest that we can find our way through to a solution or system which is free from significant contradictions. Secondly, in the process of attempting to master our understanding of Carroll's use of chess in *Through the Looking-Glass*, we need to regard his game with the same respect we afford other such enigmatic puzzles, like Fermat's Last Theorem or Russell's Paradox. Finally, we must not allow some preconceived scheme of what we think Carroll's chess problem "should" be doing influence what is there in front of us.

In examining the apparent inconsistencies of Carroll's Looking-Glass chess problem, Alexander Taylor observes that Alice's limited position in the game makes her unable to understand fully the meaning of her experiences. His argument suggests that although the reader is given the opportunity to find meaning in Carroll's unorthodox solution to his chess problem, Alice is denied the same opportunity because her involvement in the game provides her with only a very limited awareness about the nature of the events in which she is participating. The reader is allowed to peer over the entire board as a player would, seeing from move to move how the position of the various pieces develops, but there are numerous instances when Alice can not even see into the

next square.

However, it would be a mistake to conclude that the secret to Carroll's chess game lies in the reader being given a complete understanding of the nature of Alice's experiences. If we are like players scanning the Looking-Glass chess board in an effort to understand the significance behind the movements of the various pieces, then what is to be said about Carroll himself, the creator of this mysterious puzzle, smiling at us as we try our hand at his chess game? Critics have spent a considerable amount of time proposing theories about how and why the game does or does not work, but they have spent considerably less time examining how their interpretations are mediated or undercut by the limited position they are forced to assume in Carroll's game.

Thus, the question that stands before us is whether or not our critical judgment about the implications of Carroll's chess game can be trusted if we play a part in the very game we are examining. Would not our limited positions as participants in Carroll's game affect us in the same way that Alice's limited position as a pawn subverts her attempts to understand things? One way to deal with the problem is to divide things up in such a way that by examining the game Carroll plays with Alice and the game he plays with us, we can come to some sort of an understanding about our relationship to his heroine and the implications that her story has in the context of our own experiences.

Amidst the critical debate concerning Carroll's use of the chess motif, my own position is that the chess game is not simply an ill-formed problem, or a demonstration of mad logic, or a lesson in Fairy chess, but rather several games at once. On one level, it is played by each of the Looking-Glass characters who are involved in the action,

forming a struggle among individual pieces, each with a restricted sense of its own surroundings. On another level, Carroll's chess game is a problem that the reader attempts to solve, not only with respect to what the movements of the Looking-Glass characters say about what has come before (i.e. Dickens's idea about the application of retrograde analysis), but also with respect to the underlying thematic implications of Alice's dream-journey. Indeed, a close scrutiny of the solution to the chess problem reveals that the seemingly random movements of characters are in keeping with their varying degrees of restricted awareness. Thus, Alice's failure to find the social power she is looking for in promoting to a Queen is in some sense a product of how the community of chess pieces defines her potential to do so within the Looking-Glass society, just as the roles of Victorian girls and women were defined by the patriarchal society in which they lived. On yet another level, the chess problem is a demonstration by Carroll of his control not only over the events of Looking-Glass land, but our reaction to, and interpretation of them. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, he creates a new genre of imaginative fiction in which the rules of his game are not simply unfamiliar, but are apt to change as he sees fit.

### 3. Chess as Controlling Metaphor

An analysis of the chess game in *Through the Looking-Glass* suggests that it is part of a larger textual scheme in which it functions as the work's controlling motif. Alice no longer finds herself on the croquet lawns of Wonderland, but in the middle of a chess game played for the golden crown of social power on the chequered squares of Carroll's Looking-Glass gameboard. In this game she assumes identities as both player

and plaything: a participant in the combination that checkmates the sleeping Red King, and the overprotected but isolated pawn searching for a way out of the physical and intellectual entanglements by which she finds herself incessantly detained. Alice's approach to the game is informed by her social conditioning, which teaches her the importance of accepting the lowliest of positions in the game, and although her ultimate goal is to become a queen and achieve the attendant benefits of such a promotion, the Looking-Glass creatures are not ready to accept Alice in the position they have promised her. Thus, Alice's symbolic journey from innocence to experience sees her ultimately frustrated by the reality that her new position does not bring with it the social power she had imagined, but only the realization that such power is a fleeting dream.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Alice shares certain similarities with the White Queen's Pawn in *A Game at Chess* in that her "education" in the ways of the world comes by the way of a cruel trick that is played against her. Alice's discovery that her promotion does not provide her with the "feasting and fun" promised by the Red Queen is not unlike the surprise Middleton's pawn receives upon being propositioned by an opponent who she thought could guide her along the path to spiritual enlightenment:

BLACK'S BISHOP PAWN

You speak sweetly,  
I do command you first then--

WHITE QUEEN'S PAWN

With what joy  
I do prepare my duty.

BLACK'S BISHOP PAWN

To meet me  
And seal a kiss of love upon my lip.

WHITE QUEEN'S PAWN

Hah? (2.1.48-52)

Although she travels the length of the chessboard and checkmates the sleeping Red King once she has undergone promotion, Alice is consistently deprived of making important choices in bringing the game to an end. She initially accepts the role of a pawn, unaware of the current position of the pieces in the game, and is subsequently forced to endure her regimented progression towards promotion. However, Looking-Glass chess is only one of several games in which Alice is forced to participate and in which she is deprived of making crucial decisions. She is also confronted with numerous nonsense logic games which serve to challenge, entangle, and detain her throughout the course of her travels.

In each of the many games she plays, Alice is either deprived of the ability to choose or only able to make those decisions which lead to a predetermined outcome. Like the choices involved in a chess problem in which all variations lead to checkmate, her decisions lead her towards an inevitable result in a pattern that is both linear and topologically complex. The pattern is linear because regardless of the choices Alice makes, she arrives at a predetermined result, whether it be in the chess game or in trying to solve one of the innumerable riddles posed to her. However, the pattern also has a degree of topological complexity because while moments of decision for Alice may suggest the existence of alternative paths, these paths (like the trees of analysis formed from studying a chess position) can either branch out infinitely or turn in upon themselves and return to the main variation, as in Hofstadter's notion of a strange loop. Ending the game appears to offer Alice a reprieve, but our broader perspective allows us to recognize that reality, dream, and the Looking-Glass which binds them are inextricably linked, and

that the game is not over when Alice awakes from her adventures.<sup>6</sup>

As we watch Alice struggle through the skewed Looking-Glass logic games in which she is forced to participate, we recognize through the chess motif that Carroll is engaging the reader on a similar level of play. His creation of a highly unorthodox chess problem in conjunction with the curious *Dramatis Personae*--a confusing cast list which links characters in the story with chess pieces in the game--gives us a sense of being perpetually caught in our own game, and encourages our immediate identification with Alice. Carroll's text constructs a series of games for the reader that propose questions whose answers often lead to more difficult questions, just as one's analysis of a chess position becomes more difficult as the player looks further and further ahead. Like the Guard who views Alice "first through a telescope, then through a microscope, and then through an opera-glass" (149-50), we simultaneously experience Alice's adventures through the eyes of player, participant, and observer. The critical "giddiness" we

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<sup>6</sup>This represents another key difference between *Through the Looking-Glass* and *A Game at Chess* because although the termination of Carroll's chess game provides a temporary respite from, and not a satisfactory conclusion to, the larger game in which Alice is involved, Middleton's chess game ends with the definitive triumph of Anglicanism over Catholicism:

WHITE KING

So, now let the bag close, the fittest womb  
 For treachery, pride and malice, whilst we, winner-like,  
 Destroying, through heaven's power, what would destroy,  
 Welcome our White Knight with loud peals of joy. (5.3.216-19)

Just as this conclusion is important in the context of Middleton's allegorization of the Anglo-Spanish conflict, Carroll decision to play with the notions of containment and closure--his novel ends with a question directed at the reader--is vital to understanding the thematic issues raised in his novel.

experience in the process helps us to share some sense of Alice's predicament in her frustrated quest for autonomy, and allows us to appreciate the underlying thematic implications of the chess motif in Carroll's narrative.

#### 4. How Alice Learns the Game

Although her opportunity to become a pawn in the Looking-Glass chess game comes about because the White Queen's pawn "Lily" is too young to play, Alice does not learn this information until she volunteers herself to assume this subordinate role:

'I wouldn't mind being a Pawn, if only I might join--though of course I should *like* to be a Queen, best.'

She glanced rather shyly at the real Queen as she said this, but her companion only smiled pleasantly, and said 'That's easily managed. You can be the White Queen's Pawn, if you like, as Lily's too young to play; and you're in the Second Square to begin with: when you get to the Eighth Square you'll be a Queen--' (Carroll 150)

Alice's decision is conditioned not only by the Looking-Glass characters, but by those on the other side of the mirror: "Alice remains in many ways a good little girl, carrying over the Looking-Glass threshold precisely the solitudes and decorums of the authorities she is leaving behind" (Blake 134). Her enthusiasm is focused on becoming a Queen, the most powerful attacking piece on the board, but she accepts the role of a pawn because the value of this piece in the game is equivalent to her social position on the other side of the Looking-Glass, and this is the only piece that can promote to a Queen when it reaches the Eighth rank. For Alice, it appears an ideal situation; she can play the role of the pawn as her social conditioning has taught her she should, but also have the opportunity of being promoted to what she can only assume is the most powerful piece

in the game.<sup>7</sup>

The opening chapter of *Through the Looking-Glass* gives the reader a tremendous amount of insight into Alice's social conditioning in the way it portrays her acting out a reversal of the traditional role she assumes in the Victorian domestic power structure. Alice's repeated upbraiding of her kitten represents her attempt to deal with authority by sublimating her frustration and channelling it at some other object. As Kathleen Blake observes, "[Alice] quite enjoys scolding the kitten as it seems she well knows how, often having been at the receiving end of a scold herself" (Blake 133). Alice authoritatively proceeds to conduct an inquisition by itemizing her kitten's many faults:

'Number one: you squeaked twice while Dinah was washing your face this morning. Now you ca'n't deny it, Kitty: I heard you! What's that you say?' (pretending that the kitten was speaking). 'Her paw went into your eye? Well, that's *your* fault, for keeping your eyes open--if you'd shut them tight up, it wouldn't have happened. Now don't make any more excuses, but listen! Number two: you pulled Snowdrop away by the tail just as I had put down the saucer of milk before her! What, you were

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<sup>7</sup>One of the questions Carroll's handling of the chess game raises is whether the Queens are indeed the most powerful pieces on the board. Ever since the Queen was given her heightened powers during the later part of the fifteenth century, she has taken a commanding position on the chessboard, but it is still the King who must be checkmated in order to win the game. In Carroll's chess game, the Red and White Queens certainly can move a great deal faster than the other pieces (the White King tells Alice that trying to catch them is like trying to catch a Bandersnatch) and their area of awareness allows them a greater freedom of movement, but are these things valuable in Carroll's game? The Queens always seem to be distressed about something, and one wonders whether having greater powers in a chess game which is, at least on one level, controlled by the Looking-Glass characters, is what makes them so irritating and/or irritable. There is also the idea that the Red King, although asleep for the entire game, may be in total control of the game's action. Even if it *is* Alice's dream and not the Red King's, he can sleep throughout the course of the game because he does not have to worry about being removed from the board, since chess ends with the checkmate and not the capture of the King. On the other hand, the Queens must constantly be wary of being captured or being forced to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their side.

thirsty, were you? How do you know she wasn't thirsty too? Now for number three: you unwound every bit of the worsted while I wasn't looking!' (125)

This passage contains a number of important clues in understanding Alice's relationship to those who hold positions of authority over her. The kitten's inability to respond coherently to the succession of charges brought against it symbolizes Alice's own powerlessness in her desire for self-directed action. This one-sided exchange gives the reader a sense of how often Alice has been forced to endure harsh criticism without understanding what she has done to deserve it. Not surprisingly, Alice acknowledges that her scolding represents a reenactment of domestic conflict when she muses about her own punishment for things she has done wrong:

'Suppose they had saved up all *my* punishments?' she went on, talking more to herself than the kitten. 'What *would* they do at the end of a year? I should be sent to prison, I suppose, when the day came. Or--let me see--suppose each punishment was to be going without a dinner: then, when the miserable day came, I should have to go without fifty dinners at once!' (126)

Alice's grim reflections on starvation and imprisonment bring to light her acute sense of isolation, motivating her to flee from those who control the game on this side of the mirror: "She is eager to escape these authorities by transferring to the Looking-Glass room, where no one will scold her away from the fire. And as from the bottom of the rabbit hole, she imagines being able to taunt those who know she is there but can't get at her" (Blake 133).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Blake goes on to clarify her point by recognizing that despite what Alice says, she searches for personal victories within the domestic power structure which subjugates her: "All the same, Alice is not a rebel; she counts on succeeding without insurgency. It is fitting that the poem she encounters in Chapter I, "Jabberwocky," should be

Crossing over into Looking-Glass House proves to be too great a temptation for Alice to resist, but it is not the purely self-directed action that it first appears. Alice is motivated on the one hand by the opportunity to be free of the treatment she receives from authority, but she is also enticed by the mirror which magically dissolves before her and allows her passage into the other room; thus, in a sense, she is both pushed and pulled into Looking-Glass House. Of course, Alice fails to recognize that passing through the mirror does not afford her the opportunity to escape the unpleasantness of her surroundings because while the mirror inverts space and time, and even changes kittens into Queens, it does not make her any less vulnerable to the treatment she receives from the mean-tempered Looking-Glass characters.<sup>9</sup>

Although Alice crosses the Looking-Glass threshold with all of the psychological conditioning that the reader associates with a young girl of the Victorian period, she is

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concerned with battle, beheading, a victory for the child, and a reward of praise from a parental authority figure. These are the victories and rewards that play can yield a child" (133). Alice hopes that in accepting the humble role of a pawn and abiding by the rules of the chess game, she can win the praises of the Looking-Glass creatures and stand together with the Red and White Queens on the Eighth Square.

<sup>9</sup>The reason that Alice does not undergo any significant transformation in passing through the Looking-Glass can be traced to a conversation between Carroll and Alice Raikes that she recounts in the *London Times*, January 22, 1932: "One day, hearing my name, he called me to him saying, 'So you are another Alice. I'm very fond of Alices. Would you like to come and see something which is rather puzzling?' We followed him into his house which opened, as ours did, upon the garden, into a room full of furniture with a tall mirror standing across one corner. 'Now,' he said, giving me an orange, 'first tell me which hand you have got that in.' 'The right,' I said. 'Now,' he said, 'go and stand before that glass, and tell me which hand the little girl you see there has got it in.' After some perplexed contemplation, I said, 'The left hand.' 'Exactly,' he said, 'and how do you explain that?' I couldn't explain it, but seeing that some solution was expected, I ventured, 'If I was on the *other* side of the glass, wouldn't the orange still be in my right hand?' I can remember his laugh. 'Well done, little Alice,' he said. 'The best answer I've had yet'" (Gardner, *AA* 180).

certainly influenced in her decision to assume a subordinate role in the chess game by the insulting characters she meets in Garden of Live Flowers. The flowers introduce Alice to Looking-Glass discourse in a manner that makes no allowances for her understandable innocence of such things:

‘In most gardens,’ the Tiger-lily said, ‘they make their beds too soft—so that the flowers are always asleep.’

This sounded like a very good reason, and Alice was quite pleased to know it. ‘I never thought of that before!’ she said.

‘It’s *my* opinion that you never think *at all*,’ the Rose said, in a rather severe tone.

‘I never saw anybody that looked stupider,’ a Violet said, so suddenly, that Alice quite jumped. (Carroll 140)

The flowers have little difficulty humiliating Alice who, as Blake argues, "is ‘timid’ before them, and allows them to insult her. Although she threatens to pick the Daisies, she does so only out of policy in currying favor with the dominant Tiger-Lily, whom she hopes to coax into a better temperament by compliment" (Blake 135). It is hardly surprising that Alice eventually accepts a subservient role in the Looking-Glass chess game if mere flowers are able to overwhelm her.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>The flowers also pose significant problems for the reader if they are examined closely in conjunction with Carroll’s *Dramatis Personae*. The cast list indicates that the Tiger-lily, the Rose, and four of the Daisies are somehow involved in the chess game as pawns, but the reader is left to determine how. Evidently, they are not part of the game when Alice meets them because (1) they are not shown on Carroll’s diagram, and (2) their existence on this part of the board would be impossible. The Daisies given as White Rook Pawns would be located on a2 and h2 "before the commencement of the game." Pawns are unable to move laterally and so these flowers could not be expected to uproot themselves and make their way to the middle of the second rank. Carroll never makes reference to the fact that anything in the Garden has ever moved, or been transplanted for that matter. In fact, he stresses the flowers’s immobility: "'Silence, every one of you!' cried the Tiger-lily, waving itself passionately from side to side, and trembling with excitement. 'They know I ca'n't get at them!' it panted, bending its quivering head towards Alice, 'or they wouldn't dare to do it!'" (139). The flowers’ inability to move

Alice's preliminary conversation with the Red Queen further encourages her to choose Lily's humble position in the game. The Queen is perhaps not as severe in her criticisms of Alice as the flowers are, but she demonstrates her greater authority by conducting an immediate interrogation: "'Where do you come from?' said the Red Queen. 'And where are you going? Look up, speak nicely, and don't twiddle your fingers all the time.' Alice attended to all these directions, and explained, as well as she could that she had lost her way" (Carroll 142). Alice has indeed lost her way; she has relinquished the control she held in the opening chapter by undergoing a subject-object reversal with her kitten in passing through the Looking-Glass. One of the reasons she

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about is further reinforced when the Rose tells Alice about the Red Queen: "'There's one other flower in the garden that can move about like you...I wonder how you do it'" (146). Similar problems arise in arguing that the Tiger-lily, the Rose, and a second pair of Daisies are currently involved in the chess game as Red Pawns. These flowers would have to all travel a great distance, only to find themselves situated on the same square in the Garden of Live Flowers, which even Carroll's unorthodox rules would not permit. Perhaps the reader is to assume that the flowers were once part of the chess game, but no longer are, having reverted to their former occupation when they were captured, as Denis Crutch observes: "the fact that she meets them on the board but no longer in their chess character suggests that they have been taken, and have reverted to their proper characters" (Crutch 2). But in answering some of our questions, Crutch's observations elicit a number of others: Why have the flowers not been removed from the board if they have been taken in the game? When and by what means did they acquire, and subsequently relinquish, the ability to move about? And what is to be made of Carroll's eventual removal of the *Dramatis Personae*, the only piece of explicit evidence that links the flowers with the chess game? Another point to consider is the following: although the flowers do not appear to be part of the game any longer, Alice's threat to pick the Daisies is the closest Carroll comes to expressing his heroine's potential to capture as a pawn, which of course she never does. Perhaps the author is suggesting that although Alice has the potential to capture on the diagonal, she would need considerable provocation to "remove" a piece from the game. Alice has been conditioned to take a great deal of abuse from authority without being allowed to reciprocate in kind, and Carroll may be hitting on the point that little girls are conditioned to be submissive. Throughout her journey, Alice suffers constant abuse, and her ability to bear this abuse with a certain grace appears to be her only means of defence against it.

has no choice but to accept the position of a pawn is that she is forced into this role throughout the course of the conversation. Indeed, the narrative consistently interjects comments that demonstrate Alice's willingness to submit before the Red Queen: "Alice wondered a little at this, but she was too much in awe of the Queen to disbelieve it;" "Alice didn't dare argue the point;" and "Alice curtseyed again, as she was afraid from the Queen's tone that she was a *little* offended" (142-43). As the metamorphosed antithesis of Kitty, the Red Queen comes to symbolize for Alice all that is condescending and authoritative.<sup>11</sup> However, the reader must also keep in mind that although Alice is in some sense coerced into accepting the role of a pawn, she herself wants nothing more than to assume this role until the time comes when she can wield the kind of power she sees in the Red Queen, and over something more than a troupe of misbehaving kittens.

## 5. How Alice Plays the Game

### 5.1. Humble Beginnings

Once Alice has accepted her position as a pawn in the chess game, she is fated to travel her predetermined course across the chessboard towards the Eighth Square: "In this alien world Alice soon discovers...that it is she who is in a position of weakness, no longer the manipulator and controller of chessmen, but one of them...now she is the weakest man, an object to be manipulated and controlled by a power more remote than

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<sup>11</sup>Roger Lancelyn Green observes that the character of the Red Queen is based on Mrs. Prickett, Alice's governess (Green 270). In his article, "Alice on Stage," Carroll describes the character as follows: "The Red Queen I pictured as a Fury, but of another type; *her* passion must be cold and calm; she must be formal and strict, yet not unkindly; pedantic to the tenth degree, the concentrated essence of all governesses" (Gardner, *AA* 206).

the 'they' she has always known and, what is more, to be domineered over by the other pieces on the board" (Blake 134). Alice sees her progression as an achievement, but the absolute surety of the Red Queen's initial instructions to her in the Garden of Live Flowers implies that her eventual promotion is something of a foregone conclusion:

At the two-yard peg she faced round, and said 'A pawn goes two squares in its first move, you know. So you'll go *very* quickly through the Third Square--by railway, I should think--and you'll find yourself in the Fourth Square in no time. Well, *that* square belongs to Tweedledum and Tweedledee--the Fifth is mostly water--the Sixth belongs to Humpty Dumpty...the Seventh Square is all forest--however, one of the Knights will show you the way--and in the Eighth Square we shall be Queens together, and it's all feasting and fun!' (Carroll 146)

Indeed, Alice's journey along the Queen's file has a predetermination about it which exceeds that of an ordinary pawn. Because Alice does not have the opportunity to capture any of her Looking-Glass opponents while she is a pawn--the White d-pawn is never diagonally adjacent to any of the Red pieces--she does not explore the other files of the chessboard. This fundamental inability to make a conscious choice in determining a particular course of events not only deprives her of making important decisions about where she stands in the game, it further prevents her from fully comprehending the nature of her experiences.

Coupled with the idea that Alice is confined to a narrow sector of the board is the fact that she can never return to squares from which she has come. At various points Alice considers returning to a previous stage in her travels, but these yearnings to go back remain unfulfilled. Alice is fated to move forward into the trials of adolescence and adulthood without a chance to return to those "happy Summer days" that inspire her first adventures in Wonderland. The significance of Alice's remarks about going back is that

although her position in the game prevents this, her limited awareness as a pawn provides her with the illusion that she is free to return. Ultimately, the disappointment of her coronation feast dispels such illusions and makes her dream-journey soberingly complete.

Lacking solidarity with the other White pieces in the chess game, Alice is forced into passivity and submission as she moves along the chess board towards the Eighth square. Her promotion does not come to symbolize a gain of power, but only the crowning moment of her powerlessness.<sup>12</sup> Instead of finding the freedom and independence that she associates with figures of authority, Alice discovers that such freedom is a dream, and it is this sudden realization that drives her into a mad rage at the close of her own Looking-Glass dream journey: "I can't stand it any longer! she cried, as she jumped up and seized the tablecloth with both hands: one good pull, and plates, dishes, guests, and candles came crashing down together in a heap on the floor" (238).<sup>13</sup> By following her progression move by move, the reader recognizes that Alice's belief in her own autonomy is gradually replaced by the knowledge that she is powerless to choose. The chess game ends, but Alice must return to her starting square on the other side of the mirror and play out the rest of a game in which she is still no more than a

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<sup>12</sup>Richard Kelly argues that Alice's promotion brings her "a great new power through the freedom of movement" (Kelly 104). However, this new freedom proves relatively meaningless because the game soon ends. Even her capture of the Red Queen only involves moving to an adjacent square.

<sup>13</sup>In "Fairy Tales for Pleasure," Gillian Avery argues that "although in the course of her adventures Alice may be bullied and cross questioned by the creatures she meets...she always takes final control, overcoming the hostility of the court of the Queen of Hearts...and shaking the stiff, dictatorial, governessy Red Queen in *Through the Looking-Glass*, back to a soft, fat, round, black kitten. It is wish fulfilment of the most appealing kind" (Avery 131). However, Alice's actions are not at all consistent with someone taking "final control"; rather, they suggest that she has reached her wits' end.

pawn.

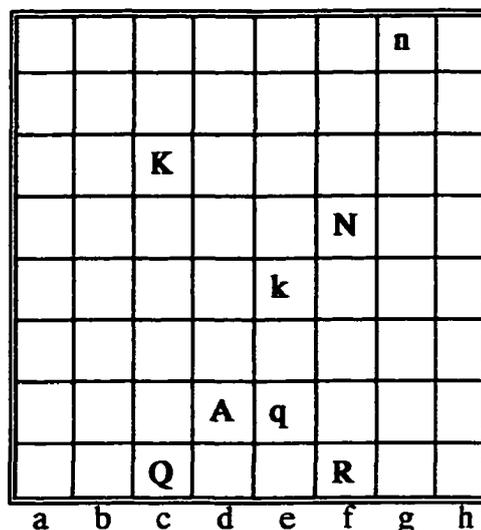


Figure 2. The First Non-Move: Alice Meets the Red Queen

The reader is aware right from the start that Carroll is tampering with the rules of orthodox chess because the first "move" in his solution to the chess problem is Alice's encounter with the Red Queen, which is not a move at all. In orthodox chess, of course, a player must always move when it is his or her turn, even though having the move is not always desirable and can even, in a number of situations, result in the loss of a game.<sup>14</sup> The fact that Alice makes a non-move, however, is in keeping with the fact that she is forced to run very quickly in order to stay in the same place:

The most curious part of the thing was, that the trees and the other things round them never changed their places at all: however fast they

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<sup>14</sup>In the early stages of a chess game it is an advantage to have the move, and the player who can maintain such an advantage will frequently be able to achieve a winning position. However, when the forces on either side are reduced in the endgame, having the move may mean having to give up control over a vital square. An example of this is found in Martin Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note*, in which John Self finds himself in a position called a trebuchet, where the player to move is in *zugzwang* and must yield critical space to his opponent.

went, they never seemed to pass anything. 'I wonder if all the things move along with us?' thought poor puzzled Alice. And the Queen seemed to guess her thoughts for she cried 'Faster! Don't try to talk!'

Not that Alice had any idea of doing *that*. She felt as if she would never be able to talk again, she was getting so much out of breath: and still the Queen cried 'Faster! Faster!', and dragged her along. 'Are we nearly there?' Alice managed to pant out at last.

'Nearly there!' the Queen repeated. 'Why, we passed it ten minutes ago! Faster!' And they ran on for some time in silence, with the wind whistling in Alice's ears, and almost blowing her hair off her head she fancied. (145)

It is easy to see why Alice's encounter with the Red Queen is not considered a move— simply put, neither one of them moves to a new square—but it is a more difficult matter to figure out why Carroll considered this encounter to be the first part of his solution to the chess problem. After all, Alice is only offered an opportunity to participate in the game *after* she meets the Red Queen! However, throughout the narrative, Carroll is very interested in Alice's ability to do non-things, whether it is to make non-moves in the chess game, to not speak,<sup>15</sup> or to see "Nobody" at great distances. The latter ability, for which she receives praise from the White King, appears to be a rather biting satirization of the inconsequential roles women were expected to play in Victorian society.

Something else that should strike us as odd about this encounter is that Alice is taught about Looking-Glass chess by the Red Queen, a member of the opposing side in the game. As Gardner notes, the strategy which the Queen outlines for Alice is to the advantage of the Red pieces because if Alice remains where she is, the sleeping Red King

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<sup>15</sup>Alice is scolded for taking the initiative in beginning conversations ("Speak when you're spoken to" the Red Queen tells her), and has a much better time of it when she keeps her opinions to herself; thus she learns that getting along with the Looking-Glass characters means being aware that knowing what to say is often less important than knowing what *not* to say; in effect, Alice learns the art of not-speaking.

can be checkmated in three moves: 1. ...Qh5?!, 2. Ng3+ Ke5 (if 2. ...Kd4 or Kd3, then 3. Qc3#), 3. Qc5+ Ke6, 4. Qd6#. The implication here is that Alice is ultimately misled by an authority figure to engage in an enterprise that is not to her own benefit. Whether or not the Red Queen recognizes it, she starts Alice down a false path, not only in preventing the White pieces from immediately checkmating the Red King, but in suggesting that Alice's eventual promotion will result in "feasting and fun."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Alice's frustration with her promotion and the symbolic coming of age it symbolizes is the result of recognizing that the Red Queen's false promises have encouraged her to become a Queen and thus better recognize how imprisoned by the "game" she really is.

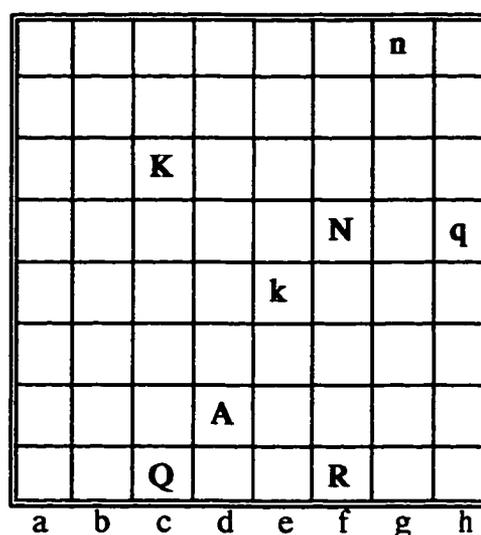


Figure 3. The First Move: 1. ...Qh5

This first actual move in the solution to Carroll's chess problem is the Red

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<sup>16</sup>The Red Queen's talk about "feasting and fun" (like the wood that deprives Alice of her name) is highly suggestive of the marriage ritual, in which becoming a Queen through the exchange of vows is closely followed by eating and drinking, or in Alice's case, non-eating and non-drinking. One wonders whether the biscuit offered to her by the Red Queen after their furious run is a symbol of the Host distributed to a congregation at a wedding or other Christian religious service.

Queen's spectacular diagonal retreat from the e2 square to h5: "How it happened, Alice never knew, but exactly as she came to the last peg, she was gone. Whether she vanished into the air, or whether she ran quickly into the wood ('and she *can* run very fast!' thought Alice), there was no way of guessing, but she was gone, and Alice began to remember that she was a Pawn, and that it would soon be time for her to move" (147). In the context of orthodox chess, the Red Queen's move is disastrous since it allows the mate in three analyzed above: The Queen appears to have a far better move in 1. ...Qa6+, since with this she harasses the White King stationed on c6 and indirectly aids her own King. The White pieces would inevitably be required to defend this attack with their own Queen or face the prospect of enduring a number of uncomfortable checks.

However, rather than serving as provocation to dismiss Carroll as a befuddled problem composer, the discrepancy between the logical 1. ...Qa6+ and the more unorthodox 1. ...Qh5 should encourage the reader to investigate why the latter move is played. A way of coming to terms with such a discrepancy without imposing a rigid scheme on the game (arguing that it operates according to the laws of Fairy Chess, for instance) is to recognize that characters move the way they do because they lack an understanding of the position of other pieces on the Looking-Glass chessboard. The Red Queen does not simply begin the game by checking the White King because she lacks the perspective afforded a player who stares over the board, and because the squares she controls—those to which she is currently able to move—do not include c6, the square on which the White King is standing. Of course, this theory of limited awareness does not fully explain why the Red Queen chooses h5 over a6, but by leaving this kind of issue

unresolved, the game yields meaning while allowing the reader to continue playing.

Thus, the current text move is a product of the Red Queen's limited scope from her position on e2. If her awareness extends to the squares to which she is currently able to move, then she can only see three of the remaining seven pieces on the board: Alice on d2, the sleeping Red King on e4, and the mysterious White Rook on f1:

+							
	+						+
		+		k		+	
			+	+	+		
			A	q	+	+	+
			+	+	R		
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h

Figure 4. The Red Queen's Area of Awareness

The Red Queen does not immediately capture Alice on d2 or the White Rook on f1 because either she is aware from a previous move that the White Queen protects them both from c1, or she is unwilling to risk exposing herself to recapture. The Red Queen also knows enough to stay away from d1, e1, f2, and f3, squares on which she can be immediately captured by the Rook (and e3, where she can be captured by Alice on d2). This leaves a6, b5, c4, d3, g2, g4, h2, and h5 as her alternatives. Of these, h2, h5, and a6 might be recognized as safest, for although Queens control fewer squares when they are at the edge of the board, here there are fewer directions from which they might be attacked. Thus, while the Red Queen's retreat seems dubious to the reader, her move

to h5 is perfectly reasonable under the given circumstances.<sup>17</sup>

However, if the Red Queen's move to h5 can be understood as the product of her limited awareness on e2, this does not immediately explain why she lacks the requisite information from her previous moves to play 1. ...Qa6+. But of course, this presupposes that there have been other moves leading up to 1. ...Qh5, which the reader must be careful not to take for granted. Indeed, it seems that in order to recognize the full implications of the Red Queen's move to h5, the reader would have to know whether Looking-Glass chess is a game or merely an elaborate exercise in problem composition; however, the ability to know this becomes problematic when the only evidence to suggest that the Queen's move is part of an ongoing game is in Carroll's *Dramatis Personae*, a cast list which the author eventually removed.

## 5.2. Elephants, Bees, Chance, and Infinity

The Red Queen's preceding lecture to Alice, coupled with the young girl's discovery of a rather curious horde of elephants, convinces her that she should find her way immediately to the Third Square: "I wo'n't go *just* yet,' she went on, checking herself just as she was beginning to run down the hill, and trying to find some excuse for turning shy so suddenly...I think I'll go down the other way,' she said after a pause; 'and perhaps I may visit the elephants later on. Besides, I *do* so want to get into the Third Square'" (148). Alice begins her journey unaware of the irony implicit in her

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<sup>17</sup>The reader might inquire why the Red Queen does not refrain from moving, since she knows that no White pieces currently threaten her capture. However, Alice blocks her view of the squares a2, b2, and c2, and if the White Queen or another Rook were on one of those squares, Alice could "discover" an attack by moving up the d-file.

observation. As a pawn, she is limited to forward movement and can not return to visit the elephants, even if she is under the impression that such a thing is possible. Although her promotion to a Queen upon reaching the Eighth Square gives her the freedom of movement to explore any region of the board, her capture of the Red Queen ends the game.

While Alice is being led down the other side of the hill towards the brook that connects to the Third Square, the reader is trying desperately to remain behind for a moment before being pulled along with her. There is something highly curious about elephants that behave like bees, poking their trunks into flowers that look "like cottages with the roofs taken off" (148), and yet Carroll dwells on the moment only briefly. In "Alice in Fairyland," A.S.M. Dickins proposes how this episode can be reconciled within the context of the prevailing chess motif:

This is the only time in the whole book that either a bee or an elephant is mentioned, for there are no bees to be seen in or around the White Knight's comical beehive, and this juxtaposition of these two widely differing creatures, bee and elephant, is odd to say the least of it, and unlike almost everything else in the book, has absolutely no relation to the rest of the story or to the world of real life. It is a very minor incident, too, and occupies only one paragraph. At first sight this seems to be merely a bit of harmless nonsense, standing as it does isolated from the rest of the story. However, there is a very simple explanation, which is to be found in the facts that the letter B, apart from being a favourite of Carroll's, is the symbol for the chess piece the Bishop, and that before the Bishop was called a Bishop some 600 years ago, it was known as an Elephant. (Dickins 15)<sup>18</sup>

Although Dickins claims to have a "very simple explanation" for this episode, his analysis

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<sup>18</sup>In addition, it should be noted that experienced chess players usually refer to their bishops as "B's."

forces the reader to confront some interesting problems. The elephants do not appear to be part of the Looking-Glass chess problem, since they are found neither in Carroll's prefatory diagram nor in the *Dramatis Personae*, which assigns the Bishop roles to the Sheep, the Aged Man, the Walrus, and the Crow. But if we accept Alexander Taylor's argument that the length and breadth of the board are functions of time, "a kind of time known only to mathematicians and mystics: the kind of time we call eternity" (Taylor 103), then it is possible to think of Alice as witnessing the remnants of some other, perhaps ancient, Looking-Glass chess game. In his lecture on the chess motif, Crutch makes reference to Tenniel's illustration of the Looking-Glass landscape in suggesting that more than one game may in fact be taking place:

Is it one vast chequered table-cloth of which any sixty-four squares will serve? Is it boards of sixty-four squares end-to-end in all directions, so that our board is only a corner square of some vaster board, and so on in an infinite series - no stranger than our universe surely? And, if this is so, is ours the only board where a game is being played? - a nineteenth-century churchman might think so. Or, are other games being played on other boards? - a nineteenth-century scientist might think so, and there are certainly a lot of characters not accounted for! (Crutch 2-3)

Crutch's comments illustrate how a relatively insignificant element of Carroll's chess motif has tremendous potential for engaging the reader in play with the text. Like a complex chess position containing a number of possible subvariations which the player must analyze in order to play the main line, this brief episode leaves the reader to speculate in several different directions at once, many of which yield some meaning but none of which shows evidence of providing a definitive solution.

For instance, the appearance of the elephants reminds us not only that chess used to be played with pieces that represented other cultural symbols or symbols of other

cultures, but that chess itself has existed in various forms from its earliest beginnings. When the game first began being played in Europe, the movements of the pieces were often governed by the rolls of dice, so that the game had an element of chance that could not be controlled by the players. I am not suggesting that Carroll solved his chess problem by rolling the dice (in any sense of the expression), but he may have wanted us to think about the differences between being a pawn in a chess game governed by strict rules and being one in a game that is ruled to some degree by chance. Could Carroll be saying that life resists the aesthetic order of a chess game contested by two highly skilled players whose moves are carefully considered and thoughtfully played, and that it is much more a disjointed series of human attempts to impose order upon chaos? From our own perspective, looking over the board from above, the movements of the chessmen almost appear as if they were determined randomly, and yet at the same time we are both aware of Alice's regimented progression towards the Eighth Square and conscious of Carroll, the chessmaster, looking over our shoulder at his cleverly crafted game.

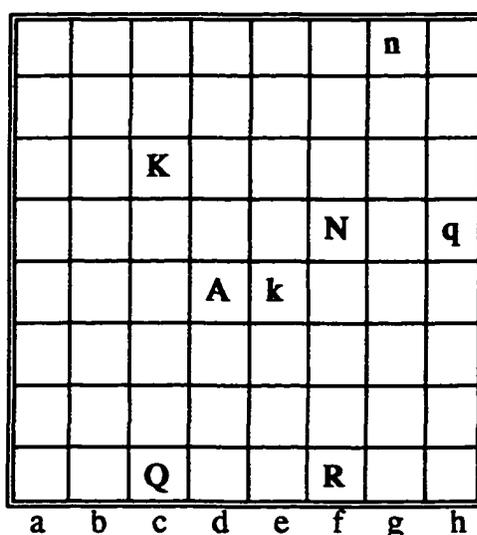


Figure 5. The Second Move: 2. d4

If the reader is disconcerted by the unorthodox first move in Carroll's solution to the chess problem, the second must appear equally baffling. Alice begins her initial two-square move to d4 by jumping over "the first of six little brooks" (149), but in so doing prevents the other White pieces from effecting a checkmate of the Red King. For the aficionado of orthodox chess, this appears to be a serious blunder, since apart from missing mate, Alice's move also misses the devastating Knight fork at g3 and allows the Red Queen time for 2. ...Qe8+.<sup>19</sup> However, understanding the logic behind Alice's move to the Fourth Square requires that we temporarily position ourselves on the Looking-Glass chessboard. Assuming this vantage point should help us to clarify some of the problems we may encounter with Alice's move.

If we consider the limited awareness of the chessmen, it makes sense to assume that only two of the White pieces can possibly know that the Red Queen has just played to h5: Alice and the White Rook. The Rook does not make an appearance in Carroll's novel—apart from being shown in the prefatory diagram—and never moves during the solution to the chess problem. If the Red Queen vanishes, as the text suggests, then the Rook might not see the monarch pass by on her journey through the f3 square to h5. However, even if the description of the Red Queen's disappearance simply applies within the limited context of Alice's scope as a pawn, and the White Rook does see the Queen as she crosses the f-file, it may be concerned about weakening the protection it affords

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<sup>19</sup>Of course, this move only delays the inevitable, since the White King can safely make its way to an area of the board where its heavy pieces will afford it permanent protection: 1. ...Qa6+, 2. Kc5 Qa5+ (2. ...Qc8+ leads to nothing because the White Queen on c1 is guarded by the Rook), 3. Kc4 Qa4+ (what else?), 4. Kc3 and the Red Queen will soon run out of checks.

the White Knight. Carroll also might be making the point that this piece is a stationary "Castle" which only holds influence over the squares that an orthodox Rook piece typically controls.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, Alice senses that she should begin moving right after the Queen disappears so as not to miss her turn: "Alice began to remember that she was a Pawn, and that it would soon be time for her to move" (147). When the Queen makes her abrupt departure, Alice is left unaware of the other pieces on the board. The squares on either side of her constitute her limited scope and they are now both empty.

When the Red Queen tells Alice that "A pawn goes two squares in its first move" (146), she tells only a half-truth, because a pawn has the option of moving either one or two squares forward from its starting position. However, no sooner does Alice jump over the brook into the Third Square than she finds herself on a train irrevocably bound for the Fourth. Since she is on a prearranged course to make the double-move first move that is afforded a pawn, Alice is neither given a choice in deciding whether or not to board the train nor provided with any opportunity to get off.<sup>21</sup>

### 5.3. A Train Ride in Passing

Although the train makes rapid progress towards the Fourth Square, Alice finds herself so utterly defeated by the antagonistic conversation which arises among the Looking-Glass passengers that one wonders if she is being metaphorically subjected to the *en passant* rule. Introduced in the Renaissance revisioning of the game, *en passant*

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<sup>20</sup>The implications of the mysterious Rook will be explored when we examine the penultimate non-move: "Queen's castle."

<sup>21</sup>Once Alice finds herself aboard the Looking-Glass train, the Guard's uncomfortable scrutinizing and angry diatribe prevent her from getting off before he shuts up the window and goes away.

allows a pawn on the fifth rank to capture an adjacent enemy pawn if the latter has just made a double-move first move. It makes sense that Carroll would attempt to introduce this special move into his novel because it has a kind of backwards effect to it that is in keeping with the theme of backwardness he explores later with the White Queen:

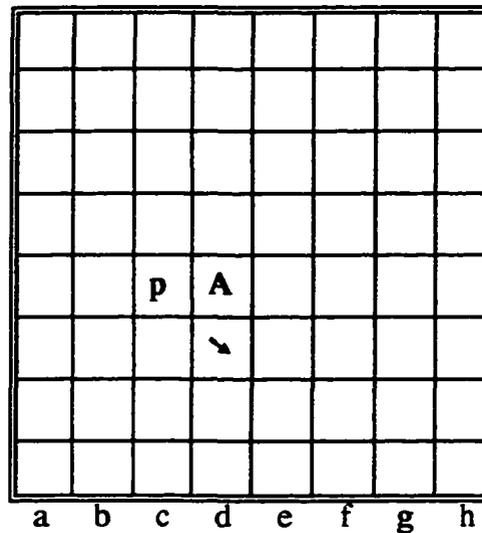


Figure 6. The *En-Passant* Rule

*En Passant* is the only move in chess in which a pawn is captured on a square over which it has already passed. By virtue of passing through its Third Square without stopping, the pawn forfeits its right of existence to any pawn adjacent to it on the Fourth rank. If we think of the P in the above diagram not as an enemy pawn, but as the (P)assengers aboard the Looking-Glass train, and if we can demonstrate that they do something to Alice during her ride through the Third Square that will cause her to lose her identity as a pawn when she is in the Fourth Square, then we can begin to see how they metaphorically effect an *en passant* capture of Alice:

‘So young a child,’ said the gentleman sitting opposite to her, (he was dressed in white paper,) ‘ought to know which way she’s going, even if she doesn’t know her own name!’

A Goat, that was sitting next to the gentleman in white, shut his eyes and said in a loud voice, 'She ought to know her way to the ticket-office, even if she doesn't know her alphabet.' (150)

The significance of this brief exchange is that it prefigures, or rather pre-ordains, that Alice will lose her memory in the wood where things have no names.<sup>22</sup> The "capture" that is threatened by the Paper Man and the Goat is their denial of Alice's right to her own identity by the act of telling her that she has already lost it. Just as the White Queen's screams prefigure her cut finger, the train passengers fix Alice's Fourth Square loss of identity by prefiguring the episode in their conversation.

The idea that Alice is subjected to a kind of metaphorical *en passant* can also be approached from another angle. The Paper Man and the Goat reduce Alice from a person to a thing by claiming not only that she is unable to identify herself, but that she does not know her own alphabet, the means by which her identity is linguistically constructed. The Beetle then completes the metamorphosis by verbally transforming Alice with the observation: "'She'll have to go back from here as luggage'" (150). Furthermore, the train passengers do this by discussing Alice in the third person, as if incidentally, or "in passing." Thus, although none of the passengers is explicitly associated with pieces in the chess game, they seem eager to punish the Alice pawn for travelling to the Fourth Square.<sup>23</sup> The train ride might provide Alice with an opportunity to get ahead in the

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<sup>22</sup>Later in the novel, the Red Queen tells Alice "when you've once said a thing, that fixes it, and you must take the consequences" (228). Here, Alice must accept the consequences of the conversation between the Paper Man and the Goat.

<sup>23</sup>The train episode involves a brilliant Carrollian word game in which the Gnat natters Alice, the Guard guards her from leaving the train, the Goat goads her, the Paper Man laces her with emotional paper cuts, and the Horse tries to contribute to all of this

game, but she finds herself, so to speak, being constantly stopped in her tracks. In many respects the passengers treat Alice just as poorly as the characters she meets in the Garden of Live Flowers, because they not only reject what she says and does, but what she thinks. When Alice is forced into silence because her attempts to speak only lead to accusations that she is costing everyone "thousands of pounds," this still does not prevent the other characters from continuing to harass her: "The voices didn't join in, *this* time, as she hadn't spoken, but, to her great surprise, they all *thought* in chorus... 'Better say nothing at all. Language is worth a thousand pounds a word!'" (149). Alice is so intimidated by this demonstration that she remains silent for several lines; the train ride might quickly bring her forward two squares to the fourth rank, but not without showing that this sort of progress comes with a price.

Carroll is also continually showing how Alice is treated as little more than a plaything by the Looking-Glass characters, and this is especially suggested when the angry Guard looks at her first through a telescope, then through a microscope, and finally through an opera-glass, and subsequently proceeds to tell her that she is travelling the wrong way. Because these instruments fix Alice within their respective lenses, even as she finds herself confined on a train--itself fixed by the tracks on which it runs--they reinforce the point that Alice is a kind of curiosity to be scrutinized and dissected by the Looking-Glass characters.<sup>24</sup> As Richard Kelly observes, "Alice is literally a pawn in a

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but is simply too hoarse.

<sup>24</sup>It seems to be something more than a coincidence that (1) the Guard looks at Alice through a microscope, a tool used in the dissection of insects, and (2) the only character Alice appears to get along with on the train is the Gnat.

game in a dream. She may believe she is in control of her movements and thoughts, but the reader, with a broader perspective, recognizes that her freedom is an illusion, that she is manipulated by the strict rules of a game and by the dreaming King" (Kelly 94).

The sense that Alice is trapped in her regimented progression towards the queening square is reinforced by the brief exchange between herself and the Paper Man that soon follows: "'Never mind what they all say, my dear, but take a return-ticket every time the train stops.' 'Indeed I sha'n't!' Alice said rather impatiently. 'I don't belong to this railway journey at all—I was in a wood just now—and I wish I could get back there!'" (151).<sup>25</sup> Alice reacts negatively to the Paper Man's advice, not simply because he and the other train passengers treat her so poorly, but because his suggestion of purchasing endless numbers of return-tickets threatens to subject her to the kind of infinite loop that would permanently forestall her progression to the queening square.

When Alice becomes a pawn she takes on an identity as a *thing* as well as a person, and this double identity informs her progress throughout the novel.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, as we have seen, no sooner does Alice come in contact with the train passengers than she

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<sup>25</sup>Once again, Alice mistakenly believes that she can get back to the wood she has left, not recognizing that her participation in the game as a piece limited to forward movement prevents this from happening.

<sup>26</sup>I agree with Gordon's comment that "[a] large part of the 'double-ness that is a structural motif in *Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* is a reflection of Alice's own condition, the result of a discovery that what she had thought to be a quest is but a metaquest, characterized by infinite regress and double-binds" (23). The notion that Alice is involved in a kind of recursive quest makes a great deal of sense because her search for autonomy requires that she undertake a quest in which (1) she dreams, (2) she plays a game in her dream, (3) she assumes the role of a pawn in the game in her dream, (4) she is mistreated as a pawn in the game in her dream, etc. Therefore, it is hardly a surprise that her efforts are ultimately frustrated.

finds herself being treated as though she is incapable of performing the simplest of human activities. Furthermore, when Alice reaches the Fourth Square she immediately finds herself in a conversation with the Gnat about naming, a conversation that has tremendous implications for her dual-identity in the chess game:

‘I suppose you don’t want to lose your name?’

‘No, indeed,’ Alice said, a little anxiously.

‘And yet I don’t know,’ the Gnat went on in a careless tone: ‘only think how convenient it would be if you could manage to go home without it! For instance, if the governess wanted to call you to your lessons, she would call out "Come here--," and there she would have to leave off, because there wouldn’t be any name for her to call, and of course you wouldn’t have to go, you know. (154-55)

In agreeing to become a pawn and travel the length of the chessboard, Alice relinquishes her name as an exclusive form of address. Perhaps more significantly, however, her symbolic progression towards adolescence threatens her with being exposed to a ritual that will remove her name permanently: the marriage ceremony. Not surprisingly, when Alice finds herself in the wood where things have no names, she appears to be trying in vain to remember her *last* name (Liddell) rather than her first: “‘And now, who am I? I *will* remember, if I can! I’m determined to do it!’ But being determined didn’t help her much, and all she could say, after a great deal of puzzling, was ‘L, I *know* it begins with L!’” (156).<sup>27</sup> In keeping with her regimented progression as a pawn in the chess game, and its implications within the broader context of her dream-journey, Alice is not

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<sup>27</sup>Supporting Gordon’s contention that Alice undergoes a disintegration of the self is Gardner’s observation that there are a number of names which she may be trying to remember: “Alice may be thinking of Lily, the name of the white pawn whose place she has taken, and also of her own last name Liddell. Perhaps, as readers Josephine van Dyk and Mrs. Carlton Hyman independently proposed, Alice is vaguely recalling the sound of her first name, which seems to begin with an *L--L-is*” (Gardner, *MAA* 211).

given the opportunity of avoiding the wood where things lose their names.

#### 5.4. The Fawn Who Would Be Pawn

Alice's encounter with the Fawn entangles the reader in another confusing game of identification involving Carroll's *Dramatis Personae* and his prefatory chess diagram. The *Dramatis Personae* lists the Fawn as the White King's Pawn, but Carroll's diagram indicates that Alice is the only pawn remaining on the board for either side when she enters the Looking-Glass chess game. The reader is therefore encouraged to investigate whether the Fawn is a participant in the current game, a captured piece that has reverted to its original form, or a character that has nothing to do with the chess game at all.

In examining this episode in his *More Annotated Alice*, Martin Gardner suggests that Alice and the Fawn form a duo pawn formation: "Presumably the two pawns, both white, are now adjacent to each other" (Gardner, *MAA* 211). However, the problem with this assumption is that the Fawn would have to be situated on either the e4 or c4 square.<sup>28</sup> It makes little sense to say that there is a White Pawn located on e4, since the sleeping Red King inhabits this square throughout the course of Carroll's problem. Even with the liberties that the author takes in his solution to the chess game, he never goes so far as to place two pieces on the same square, unless a capture is taking place. However, assuming that the White King's Pawn must therefore be situated on c4 also raises a number of uncomfortable problems. A pawn on the c-file would stand in the way of the White Queen's eventual moves to c4 and c5. Furthermore, in order to make its way over

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<sup>28</sup>This follows from Alexander Taylor's argument that the chessmen "are always on the square next to [Alice] on one side or another" (Taylor 100).

to Alice, the White King's Pawn--which begins the game on e2--would be required to make a series of two captures, the first of which would bring it to d3 and the next, to c4. Since we have established that two pieces can not occupy the same square at once, the pawn would have to perform its first capture before the Red Queen makes her way to e2. The reader would further have to assume that the Red King--who sleeps throughout the course of the chess problem--is allowed to ignore the check given by the White King's Pawn as it moves into d3. However, there is no evidence in the text to suggest that any of this has taken place. Furthermore, the manner in which the Fawn quickly flees from Alice upon discovering her true identity is most unlike a pawn's movement: "A sudden look of alarm came into its beautiful brown eyes, and in another moment it had darted away at full speed" (157).

Perhaps the Fawn is a piece that is no longer active in the chess game, having reverted to its original form upon being captured. However, if the Fawn is a pawn that has been taken in the game, there is no reason for it to flee from Alice when they exit the forest together: "'I'm a Fawn!' it cried out in a voice of delight. 'And dear me! you're a human child'" (157). The Fawn's failure to recognize Alice as a pawn suggests that the creature was never a participant in the game. Even so, Fred Madden's comment "that Alice, a pawn, is here meeting a fawn, and that in Carroll's game of doublets the change of a single letter turns 'pawn' to 'fawn'" (Gardner, *MAA* 211) suggests that the Fawn cannot be completely divorced from the chess problem. Thus, the reader is ultimately left in a quandary about how to reconcile this episode with Carroll's prevailing chess motif.

But herein lies a perfect example of Carroll's genius in his handling of the chess game, because the paradox that seems to arise in figuring out the nature of the Fawn's involvement with the game is precisely the sort of thing that keeps rearing its Jabberwockian head at Alice during the course of her adventures. It is just as difficult for us to accept the conceptual paradox formed by the statements:

The Fawn is part of the chess game.  
 The Fawn was part of the chess game.  
 The Fawn was never part of the chess game.

as it is for Alice to accept:

The Walrus is worse than the Carpenter.  
 The Carpenter is worse than the Walrus.

or most certainly:

The Eighth Square is all "feasting and fun."  
 The Eighth Square is not all "feasting and fun"

#### 5.5. The Two Towers: Easy to Find, Difficult to Leave

Alice's fixed course in travelling the Queen's file of the chessboard is accentuated by the series of signposts leading to the house of Tweedledum and Tweedledee: "'And now, which of these finger-posts ought I to follow, I wonder?'" It was not a very difficult question to answer, as there was only one road through the wood, and the two finger-posts both pointed along it. 'I'll settle it,' Alice said to herself, 'when the road divides and they point different ways.' But this did not seem likely to happen" (157). Regardless of how Alice wants to proceed, the strict rules regarding her movement combined with her current location on the board prevent her from doing anything but continuing straight ahead. Just like a chess position in which all roads lead to mate, the

signposts seem to offer Alice choices but only afford a single possibility: "Her apparent freedom to choose her own route is an illusion" (Blake 138). Naturally, this has implications in the broader context of what Carroll is saying about Alice's symbolic coming of age, because all little girls eventually grow up to be not-little-girls regardless of the particular signposts they follow.

Alice's inability to make quick progress manifests itself not only in her relatively slow physical movement across the Looking-Glass chessboard, but in the nonsense arguments in which she finds herself perpetually entangled. Alice frequently worries that she will not have enough time to reach the Eighth Square, and her prolonged encounter with Tweedledum and Tweedledee is one such episode that exposes her limitations as a slow moving pawn in the game. Like a couple of badgering parents, the Tweedle Twins consistently respond to her questions and observations with the words "Nohow" and "Contrariwise," checking her progress in the conversation in the same way that their digressions prevent her from moving on in the game.<sup>29</sup> Like the Flowers, the Red Queen, and the passengers aboard the train, Tweedledum and Tweedledee focus the discussion on Alice's ignorance of Looking-Glass logic: "'I know what you're thinking about,' said Tweedledum; 'but it isn't so, nohow.' 'Contrariwise,' continued Tweedledee, 'if it was so, it might be; and if it were so, it would be; but as it isn't, it ain't. That's logic'"

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<sup>29</sup>By adopting these terms, Tweedledum and Tweedledee engage in a kind of verbal dance with Alice in which her observations lead inevitably to these negating rejoinders. Not surprisingly, Alice finds herself in a literal dance with the twins when she attempts to shake hands with them: "the next moment they were dancing round in a ring. This seemed quite natural (she remembered afterwards), and she was not even surprised to hear music playing" (161). Blake has noted that "a dance has a timeless quality" because it is circular, infinite, and requires rules for stopping (Blake 139).

(160). Alice attempts to get directions out of the woods on three separate occasions, but the Tweedle Twins thwart her each time by changing the subject.

The reader is similarly at a loss for directions about how to reconcile Tweedledum and Tweedledee with Carroll's chess game. Alice meets the twins (whom the *Dramatis Personae* gives as White's Rooks) near the end of her progression through the Fourth Square. The Red Queen has previously warned Alice that this square belongs to these curious characters, which suggests that they both occupy the same square at once. Naturally, this disqualifies Tweedledum and Tweedledee from being active chess pieces, as only one piece is permitted on each square at a time. Indeed, if they were currently functioning as White Rooks in the game, they could not inhabit c4, d4, or e4, the squares on which they would have to be standing in order to meet Alice. The c4-square is currently open, but both Rooks would be unable to occupy it at the same time. Since d4 and e4 have pieces on them already, there would be no other place for the remaining Rook to stand that would allow Alice to be aware of him. In addition, the presence of a White Rook on d4 would prevent Alice from making her way into this square in the first place. Finally, according to Carroll's diagram, the sleeping Red King permanently rests on the e4 square. The Tweedle Twins would have to share this square with the Red King, which makes as little sense as suggesting that either Haigha or Hatta shares the c6 square with the White King.

However, there is also a problem with assuming that Tweedledum and Tweedledee represent captured White Rooks who have reverted to their original forms, especially if one asks the question that Denis Crutch does in his lecture on Carroll's chess problem:

"'If Tweedledum and Tweedledee are White Rooks, then who was the White Rook on the board when Alice joined the game?'" (Crutch 1). This Rook is certainly not one of the Tweedle Twins, as it does not remove itself from the King's Bishop file and make its way to c4 before Alice reaches the d4 square. Crutch goes on to posit that "[p]erhaps the Tweedles are only one person after all, a pair of stereoscopic photographs, as A. M. Richards suggests - that would leave room for another Rook would it not?" (1). The problem with this argument is that Carroll's *Dramatis Personae* lists Tweedledum and Tweedledee as two distinct pieces who are arranged several files apart from one another before the commencement of the game.

Although these observations might encourage us to speculate that Tweedledum and Tweedledee have nothing whatsoever to do with Carroll's chess game, the characterization of the Twins suggests otherwise. Indeed, they look very much like miniature fortresses (or Castles) when they dress themselves up for battle:

So the two brothers went off hand-in-hand into the wood, and returned in a minute with their arms full of things--such as bolsters, blankets, hearth-rugs, table-cloths, dish-covers, and coal-scuttles. 'I hope you're a good hand at pinning and tying strings?' Tweedledum remarked. 'Every one of these things has to go on, somehow or another.'

Alice said afterwards she had never seen such a fuss made about anything in all her life--the way those two bustled about--and the quantity of things they put on--and the trouble they gave her in tying strings and fastening buttons. (Carroll 170)

In addition, the manner in which Tweedledum and Tweedledee move seems consistent with the powers afforded the Rook in chess. Tenniel's illustrations show the Twins to have significant girths, but when the black Crow sweeps down upon these heavily, albeit curiously, armoured characters they are nevertheless able to make a quick exit: "'It's the

crow!' Tweedledum cried out in a shrill voice of alarm; and the two brothers took to their heels and were out of sight in a moment" (172).

Like Alice's frustrated progress in her arguments with Tweedledum and Tweedledee, our investigation of the Twins' involvement in the chess game is inevitably brought back to the point at which our deliberations began. If it makes little sense to say that Tweedledum and Tweedledee are active pieces in the game, or captured pieces that have reverted to their original form, or characters having nothing to do with chess whatsoever, then the text has done as much to prevent the reader from a full comprehension of things as Tweedledum and Tweedledee have similarly done for Alice. Ultimately, the novel's ambiguous presentation of Tweedle Twins's relationship to Looking-Glass chess encourages us to identify with Alice's isolated position by reminding us that we are not only observers of the game in which she participates, but participants in the one that Carroll constructs as well.

#### 5.6. Alice is an Oyster is the Novel

Alice is deceived in her belief that reaching the Eighth Square and becoming a Queen will empower her, and this is grimly echoed in Tweedledee's recitation of "The Walrus and the Carpenter." In this disturbing tale, the inhabitants of an oyster bed are brought to their doom because they trust in the words of a charismatic Walrus. Alice is caught in a similar predicament in the chess game; she trusts in the words of the Red Queen that the Eighth Square will prove "all feasting and fun," but what she experiences is instead summed up by the Walrus in his commentary on the Oyster's fate:

*'It seems a shame,' the Walrus said,  
'To play them such a trick.*

*After we've brought them out so far,  
And made them trot so quick!"* (165)

Unfortunately, Alice's limited awareness in the chess game does not allow her to see that she will shortly be a victim of the same kind of deception that is practised on the Oyster. All of her running with the Red Queen to stay in the same place, her laborious journey along the d-file of the chessboard, and the mean-spirited treatment she has had to endure in the process, only bring about the disappointing "trick" that the Eighth Square is not all "feasting and fun" as the Red Queen promised her, but a mix of impossible examinations and chaotic non-eating rituals.

Also embedded in "The Walrus and the Carpenter" is Carroll's own allegorical commentary on the new literary genre of chess-fantasy he has created in *Through the Looking-Glass*. If we think of the Oysters as a text and the Walrus and the Carpenter as readers of that text, then we can see that the latter use whatever means necessary to devour the contents of what they read. Oysters are known to produce pearls, but the Walrus and the Carpenter are neither interested in the pearls, nor in how Oysters produce them. They simply want to consume. Of course, Carroll's point is that there is no chance for a reader of his text to get to the pearl without trying to recognize how the Oyster works. Understanding the Oyster may seem far less interesting than simply consuming it, but it is a question of how desperate one is to get at the pearl.

Alice's ability to choose is once again rendered problematic when she tries to decide whether she likes the Walrus or the Carpenter best. Although she is convinced of having understood the poem correctly, Alice is given a lesson by the Tweedle Twins on the fundamental difference between truth and perception:

'I like the Walrus best,' said Alice: 'because he was a *little* sorry for the poor oysters.'

'He ate more than the Carpenter, though,' said Tweedledee. 'You see he held his handkerchief in front, so that the Carpenter couldn't count how many he took: contrariwise.'

'That was mean!' Alice said indignantly. 'Then I like the Carpenter best--if he didn't eat so many as the Walrus.'

'But he ate as many as he could get,' said Tweedledum.

This was a puzzler. After a pause, Alice began, 'Well! They were *both* very unpleasant characters--' (166-67)

Alice looks at the poem as a didactic Victorian fable whose solution requires that she answer an implicit question concerning whether the Walrus or the Carpenter is the more humane character, but she soon realizes that the answer only leads to more questions. The Walrus seems more endearing because "he feels a *little* sorry for the poor Oysters," but he does not let his emotions get in the way of his work when "*with sobs and tears he sort[s] out / Those of the largest size*" (166). As Tweedledee points out, the Walrus eats more than the Carpenter and employs deception in order to ensure that this goes unnoticed. This then suggests to Alice that the Carpenter is "best--if he didn't eat so many as the Walrus," but unfortunately his gluttony causes him to eat as many as he can:

*'It was so kind of you to come!  
And you are very nice!'  
The Carpenter said nothing but  
'Cut us another slice.  
I wish you were not quite so deaf--  
I've had to ask you twice!'* (165)

Alice finds herself participating in a game which does not have a definite resolution, but is instead a two-part strange loop of the kind Hofstadter describes in *Godel, Escher, Bach*. Alice's only way to resolve things is to propose a solution which rejects the paradox by stepping outside of it: "Well! They were *both* very unpleasant characters."

This appears to prefigure the final moments of Alice's dream-journey, when to reject the paradox of her promotion to powerlessness, she grabs hold of the Red Queen and shakes her into a kitten.

### 5.7. Alice, The Red King, and Nested Dreams

When Alice begins the chess game, she is not provided with an opportunity to move only one square forward on her first move, but instead finds herself on a train bound for the Fourth Square. However, the reason Alice does not move only one square forward is clarified during her encounter with the sleeping Red King:

'He's dreaming now,' said Tweedledee: 'and what do you think he's dreaming about?'

Alice said, 'Nobody can guess that.'

'Why, about *you!*' Tweedledee exclaimed, clapping his hands triumphantly. 'And if he left off dreaming about you, where do you suppose you'd be?'

'Where I am now, of course,' said Alice.

'Not you!' Tweedledee retorted contemptuously. 'You'd be nowhere. Why, you're only a sort of thing in his dream!'

'If that there King was to wake,' added Tweedledum, 'you'd go out--bang!--just like a candle!' (168)

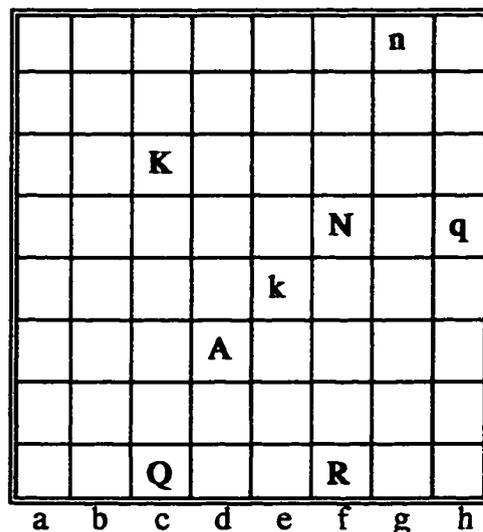


Figure 7: What if Alice Played 2. d3+?

The Red King sleeps throughout the entire game, and an earlier move by Alice to d3 would have placed him in check, since pawns attack along their forward diagonals. Presumably this would have forced him to wake from his dream and snuff Alice out like a candle, as Tweedledum and Tweedledee currently maintain. However, the trick is that while the Red King is dreaming of Alice, Alice is in turn dreaming of the Red King, "like two mirrors facing one another" (Gardner, AA 228). Here we have an example of Carroll's exploration of a rather complex recursive system in which Alice dreams of playing a chess game in which the Red King dreams of Alice dreaming about playing a chess game in which the Red King dreams of Alice, and so on *ad infinitum*. However, in order for the Red King to awaken, he needs either to wake himself or to have someone wake him who exists outside his dream. Although Alice appears to exist both in the Red King's dream and outside of it (that is to say, in her own dream), her dream is contained within his dreaming, and so on one level, she does not exist outside of his dream and therefore can not wake him. But apart from arguing that Alice does not move to the Third Square and give check so that she can avoid tearing a hole in the cosmic fabric, I would suggest that the infinite containment of recursive dreaming reinforces the author's continuing preoccupation with Alice's containment. On one hand, Carroll shows an obvious erotic interest in little girls (and a fundamental disinterest in women) and his narrative is a way of keeping Alice from ever growing old. On the other hand, he demonstrates an anguished recognition that little girls like Alice fall into a recursive system: they lose their childhood innocence in growing up and becoming young women who are ultimately treated no better than little girls. Of course, the text's discourse on

containment and recursive dreaming is ultimately contained within Carroll's own dream, his story of Alice's adventures, which perpetually reenacts his anxiety over the dreadful implications lying beneath the surface of Alice's symbolic dream journey even as it celebrates the triumph of her youth and innocence.

						n	
		K					
					N		q
		Q	A	k			
					R		
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h

Figure 8. The Third Move: 3. Qc4

Carroll's knowledge of the game appears somewhat suspect when he permits the White pieces to move again with 3. Qc4 before the Red pieces are able to respond to Alice's train ride. However, the question to be asked is whether there are any Red pieces that have seen Alice move. From h5, the Red Queen's influence does not extend to either the d3 or d4 squares. The Red Knight only maintains control of the e7, f6, and h6 squares and is likewise unaware of Alice's movement. The Red King overlooks d3 and d4, but the fact that he is asleep rules out the possibility of him taking action. Only the insolent passengers aboard the train know that Alice has reached the Fourth Square and none of them is associated with the chess game in Carroll's *Dramatis Personae*. However, although these observations explain why none of the Red pieces move, they

do not adequately address what possesses the White Queen to ignore a number of perfectly reasonable checkmates on the board in order to go chasing after her shawl:

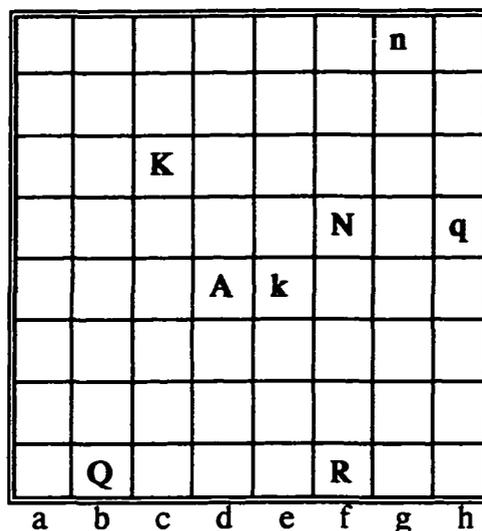


Figure 9. White Can Checkmate with 3. Qb1#

As the diagram illustrates, 3. Qb1 is checkmate since the Red King is without an escape square. The Alice pawn on d4 is totally immune from capture because the White Knight on f5 protects it. The d5 square is guarded by the White King, the e5 square is protected by Alice, and the f3, f4, f5, and d3 squares are controlled either by the Queen on b1 or the Rook on f1. The only other square, e3, is guarded by the White Knight. Similarly, 3. Qc2 is checkmate for the very same reasons. Additionally, 3. Qe3 is mate because the White Queen is protected from capture by the White Knight. There are a number of other alternatives which are also superior to the text move: 3. Ng3+ wins the Red Queen through a forking check at g3 and Re1+ is winning after 3. ...Kxf5, 4. Re5+, skewering the Queen.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Other king moves lead to a similar fate: (A) if 3. ...Kd3 then 4. Re3# and (B) if 3. ...Kf3 then 4. Qd1+ winning the Red Queen. Of course, forcing the Red King to

However, in accepting the condition that the White Queen is only able to understand the position of the pieces on the board in terms of the rules governing her available movement, the reader can make some sense out of her shawl-chasing expedition to c4. Before Alice travels by railway to the Fourth Square, the White Queen can presumably see three other pieces on the board: Alice on d2, the stationary White Rook on f1, and the White King on c6. Once Alice moves, the White Queen's awareness extends to the squares on the c1-h6 diagonal.

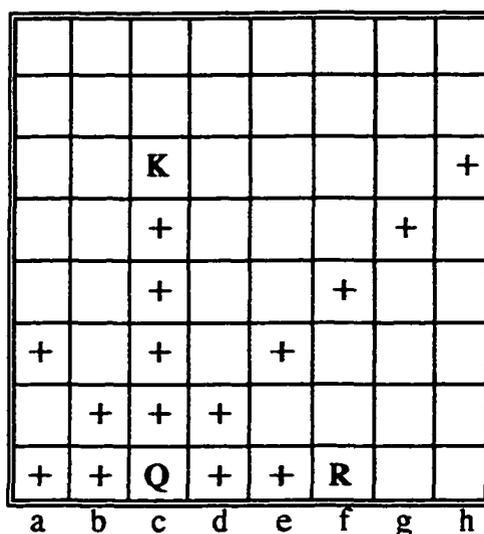


Figure 10. The White Queen's Area of Awareness

The White Queen's decision to chase after her shawl instead of effecting a checkmate at b1, c2, or e3 is not surprising considering that her position on c1 precludes her from knowing the current location of the Red King. His location is still a mystery to her by the time she has concluded her move since Alice's position on d4 blocks her line of sight along the fourth rank of the chessboard.

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move in the Looking-Glass chess game seems to be a rather dangerous proposition.

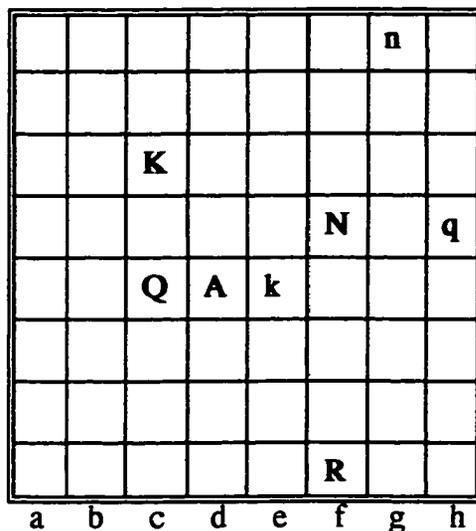


Figure 11. The Second Non-Move: Alice Meets the White Queen

In typical Looking-Glass style, Alice's second non-move is a mirror image of her first: here on the Fourth Square she meets the bumbling White Queen to her left whereas on the Second Square she met the uncompromising Red Queen to her right. The roles appear to be completely reversed this time, with Alice taking an active role in offering to help the White Queen with her dreadful appearance instead of being passively lectured, but to see this episode as somehow the antithesis of Alice's encounter with the Red Queen in the Garden of Live Flowers is to miss a key point. Although the White Queen might not be as severe as her red counterpart, her familiarity with the rules of Looking-Glass logic and the assumptions she makes about the class differences between herself and Alice place her in a privileged position.

#### 5.8. The White Queen and "Pinning"

Not surprisingly, Alice immediately shows why she has chosen to be a pawn in the Looking-Glass chess game by offering to help the White Queen with her shawl: "I don't know what's the matter with it!" the Queen said, in a melancholy voice. 'It's out

of temper, I think. I've pinned it here, and I've pinned it there, but there's no pleasing it!' 'It *ca'n't* go straight, you know, if you pin it all on one side,' Alice said, as she gently put it right for her; 'and, dear me, what a state your hair is in!'" (173-74).<sup>31</sup> It appears that Alice initially takes control in this scene, like a mother dressing her helpless child, but she plays the role so faithfully that the White Queen offers to hire her on a permanent basis as a serving maid. Quite naturally, Alice does not want to be hired, but apparently she forgets that she has, in effect, already offered her services by agreeing to participate in the chess game as the White Queen's pawn.

The Queen's characterization as disorganized and dishevelled has implications for Alice's frustrated efforts to be free of the rules and restrictions imposed upon her by the Looking-Glass characters. The fact that everything about the White Queen is knotted and disordered symbolically suggests how Alice finds herself becoming more and more entangled, not simply in the endless nonsense arguments and word games in which she is forced to engage, but in the larger context of her search for autonomy. The White Queen's ability to remember "things that happened the week after next" (175) also has

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<sup>31</sup>A Queen who is unable to "pin" her shawl would not seem to make a very successful candidate for an effective chess piece, since "pinning" is an important tactic in the game's strategy. A pin occurs when a piece or pawn is under attack but unable to move because to do so would expose a more valuable piece to attack. Interestingly enough, nowhere during the course of her movements across the chessboard does the White Queen ever pin an opposing piece or find herself in a pin, in the traditional sense. However, if we look at the game as a product of Looking-Glass logic, we can see that while Alice is doing her best to pin the White Queen, the White Queen is effectively pinning Alice to the Red King. Alice can not move without exposing the Red King to check, and exposing herself to the consequences that could arise if he somehow was forced to wake up. This is rather startling, since it shows that Alice not only has to worry about the Red pieces, but the White pieces as well.

implications here because it underlines the point that becoming a Queen brings with it the realization of how predetermined things really are. If Alice is the novice chess player who can not see the diabolical combination being played on her behalf, the White Queen—however simple she appears—is the experienced player who not only sees the combination, but understands that nothing can be done to prevent it:

‘When I fasten my shawl again,’ the poor Queen groaned out: ‘the brooch will come undone directly. Oh, oh!’ As she said the words the brooch flew open, and the Queen clutched wildly at it, and tried to clasp it again.

‘Take care!’ cried Alice. ‘You’re holding it all crooked!’ And she caught at the brooch; but it was too late: the pin had slipped, and the Queen had pricked her finger.

‘That accounts for the bleeding, you see,’ she said to Alice with a smile. ‘Now you understand the way things happen here.’ (176)<sup>32</sup>

Even though her abilities make her one of the two most powerful attacking pieces on the chessboard, the White Queen understands that she is subject to rules not specifically designed for her own benefit, but for the benefit of a White King whose loss would result in the end of the game. It is therefore not surprising that although she tries to amuse herself by believing "as many as six impossible things before breakfast" (177), the White Queen admits that she is really unable to be glad about anything, because she can not remember the rule.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>The Queen’s remark that "It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards" (175) alludes to the importance of visualization in chess play. In order to be successful at the game, a player is required to look ahead and see strategic and tactical possibilities before they happen.

<sup>33</sup>However, the White Queen does recall the rule regarding "jam to-morrow and jam yesterday but never jam today" (174) which has a rather serious implication for Alice’s dream-journey. Namely, the promises made to Alice by the Red Queen about what to expect when she reaches the Eighth Square are also liable to be waiting for her tomorrow or yesterday and not today. The jam rule seems to be another bit of Carrollian

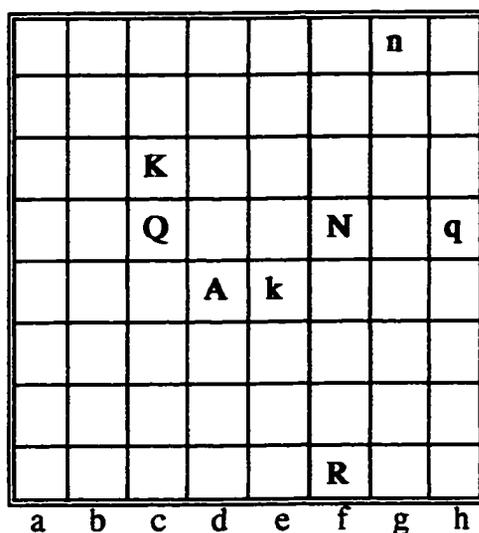


Figure 12. The Fourth Move: 4. Qc5

The solution to the chess problem continues when the White Queen loses her shawl for a second time, and she is forced to give chase by crossing over into the c5 square; in effect, her shawl becomes unpinned and her movement unpins Alice. The White Queen's move continues to destabilize our orthodox ideas about chess strategy and tactics because in flailing wildly after her shawl, the Queen misses giving checkmate at c2. The White Knight guards both the d4 pawn and the e3 flight square, while the White King and Alice respectively watch over d5 and e5. Furthermore, the move 4. Qc5 not only fails to take advantage of the Red Knight on g8 which is lying *en prise*, but it also breaks the mutual protection of White's major pieces, removing the only defender of the stationary Rook on f1. One wonders why the author chose this particular move considering that of the numerous legal moves available for the White pieces, more than

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nonsense logic until one recognizes its real-life corollary applies to children who are scolded about things they should have done yesterday or things that they can wait to do until tomorrow.

half would not put the Red King in check and force him to wake up. Indeed, Carroll's choice seems arbitrary and works to resist critical attempts to systematize the chess problem. For instance, Dickins argues from a Fairy Chess perspective that "The White Queen helps to prepare the way for Alice's Excelsior march, and also teaches Alice Liddell the proper movements of a Queen in chess" (11). However, the critic does not seem to be troubled by the fact that the White Queen is not required to support Alice's advance from the central squares of the c-file. On the Fourth Square, Alice is guarded by the White Knight stationed on f5, and on the Fifth, Six, and Seventh Squares, she is protected by the King on c6.

In spite of these considerations, though, there is a definite logic behind the White Queen's move. For instance, other apparent wins are not so easy as they first appear. The White pieces can effect a mate in two with either 4. d5+ Ke5, 5. Qd4# or 4. Ng3+ Ke3, 5. Qc3#, but both of these strategies require the Red King to wake up and move, and this of course poses a significant problem. Also, the White Queen has no desire to capture the Knight on g8 because she does not know if it is being protected by a friendly piece. She is still unaware of the location of either the Red King or Queen because Alice's presence on d4 shields her from the first, and her own outpost on c4 prevents her from noticing the second. Perhaps most importantly, however, the White Queen desperately wants to retrieve her shawl and prove to Alice that she can pin it on again all by herself. Keeping these things in mind, 4. Qc5 suddenly appears to make quite a bit

of sense.<sup>34</sup>

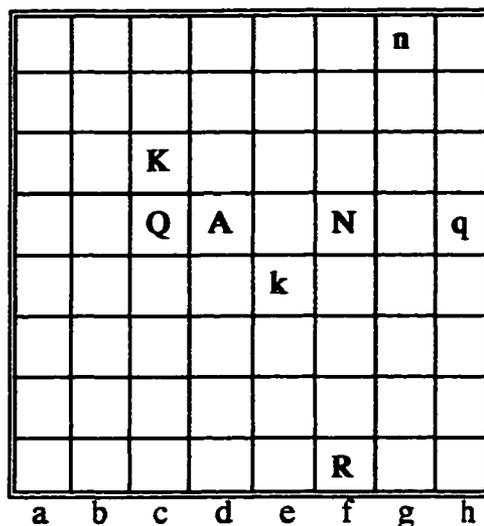


Figure 13. The Fifth Move: 5. d5

Concerned for the White Queen who has just demonstrated her ability to bleed long before injuring herself, Alice makes the fifth move in the game by crossing the brook into the d5 square. Although unaware of it, she takes advantage of the fact that the Red Pieces are ignorant of the previous move. With 5. d5, the White pieces once again miss 5. Qc2# and 5. Ng3+ Ke3, 6. Qc3# winning the game, and either 5. Nd6+ or 5. Qd5+ winning material, but the difficulties posed by these last two combinations in potentially waking up the sleeping Red King more than offset their merits. Thus, Alice's advance to d5 makes sense considering both her limited awareness as a pawn and

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<sup>34</sup>Something else to consider about 4. Qc5 is that with it Carroll establishes some interesting Looking-Glass contrasts with the Red Queen's move to h5. The Red Queen proceeds methodically, marking out terrain with a series of pegs and advising Alice in advance what she will do when she comes to each of them, but her eventual movement to h5 is, from Alice's perspective, unexplainable. On the other hand, the White Queen's move is disordered and spontaneous, but Alice is able to see the whole of the move because the Queen winds up on c5, a square that is diagonally adjacent to d4.

her efforts to keep up with her bumbling companion. Curiously, though, she knows the current location of the Red King, but does not have the opportunity to capture him, and either forgets or simply does not bother to mention his location to the White Queen.

It also seems a little strange that Alice has no reservations about moving at this point if she has just witnessed the White Queen make a move for her side. In the opening chapter, Alice demonstrates her acquaintance with the basic rules and strategies of the game in her conversation with the black kitten: "‘Kitty, can you play chess? Now, don’t smile, my dear, I’m asking it seriously. Because, when we were playing just now, you watched just as if you understood it: and when I said "Check!" you purred! Well, it *was* a nice check, Kitty, and really I might have won, if it hadn’t been for that nasty Knight that came wriggling down among my pieces’" (126). Presumably, Alice is aware of the rule of alternating turns and yet she ignores it by crossing into the Fifth Square immediately after the White Queen moves.<sup>35</sup> However, Carroll appears to be making the point that playing chess over-the-board is different from being involved as a piece in the game, and that one is apt to forget certain rules if no one else is around to object.

### 5.9. The Odd Curiosity Shop

No sooner does Alice cross the brook than she finds that the White Queen has turned into a Sheep and that both of them are in a shop. Just as Alice finds herself on

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<sup>35</sup>Carroll wisely keeps the extent of Alice’s chess knowledge ambiguous. In the opening chapter she seems to have a certain familiarity with the game, but when she reaches the Eighth Square of the Looking-Glass gameboard, she asks the Red and White Queens if the game is over. The latter might seem to indicate that Alice does not understand how a chess game is concluded, but we have to take into consideration her limited awareness as a participant in this particular game.

the Looking-Glass train without apparently choosing to board it, so does she find herself in the shop without an opportunity to make this decision either:

She looked at the Queen, who seemed to have suddenly wrapped herself up in wool. Alice rubbed her eyes, and looked again. She couldn't make out what had happened at all. Was she in a shop? And was that really--was it really a *sheep* that was sitting on the other side of the counter? Rub as she would, she could make nothing more of it. (178)

The manner in which Alice is forced to conduct herself in the shop underscores her limited abilities as a pawn in the chess game. Alice wishes to look "all round" her before deciding on what she will purchase, but the Sheep informs her that her limited scope makes this impossible: "'You may look in front of you, and on both sides, if you like,' said the Sheep; 'but you can't look *all* round you--unless you've got eyes at the back of your head.' But these, as it happened, Alice had *not* got: so she contented herself with turning round, looking at the shelves as she came to them" (178). In Carroll's chess game, Alice's status as a pawn allows her only to be aware of what is directly in front, adjacent, or diagonally adjacent to her, and she finds herself being reminded of this here.

Alice's frustrating inability to choose manifests itself once again when she endeavours in vain to select something to buy from the shop: "whenever she looked hard at any shelf, to make out exactly what it had on it, that particular shelf was always quite empty, though the others round it were crowded as full as they could hold" (179). Here Carroll suggests how Alice is deceived into thinking that the privilege of choosing is narrowly beyond her grasp and that if she could only get to the Eighth Square and become a Queen she would be able to do anything she wanted. Indeed, this scene grimly foreshadows that Alice will be unable to lay hold of the elusive prize that she has been

told awaits her on the Eighth Square: "I'll follow it up to the very top shelf of all. It'll puzzle it to go through the ceiling, I expect!" But even this plan failed: the 'thing' went through the ceiling as quietly as possible, as if it were quite used to it" (179).

Carroll's investigation of the theme of frustrated choice clears the way for his deeper exploration of mutability when Alice, accompanied by the Sheep, finds herself rowing between the banks of a stream and endeavouring to collect a handful of scented rushes. No matter how desperately Alice wants to secure them, the most beautiful ones are always just beyond her grasp: "I only hope the boat won't tipple over!" she said to herself. 'Oh, *what* a lovely one! Only I couldn't quite reach it.' And it certainly *did* seem a little provoking ('almost as if it happened on purpose,' she thought) that, though she managed to pick plenty of beautiful rushes as the boat glided by, there was always a more lovely one that she couldn't reach" (181). The rushes have a much deeper significance than the prize in the shop because they symbolize Alice herself who, although unaware of it, participates in the same cycle of life that will see her own youth and beauty ultimately wither and die: "What mattered it to her just then that the rushes had begun to fade, and to lose all their scent and beauty, from the very moment that she picked them? Even real scented rushes, you know, last only a very little while--and these, being dream-rushes, melted away almost like snow, as they lay in heaps at her feet--but Alice hardly noticed this, there were so many other curious things to think about" (182).<sup>36</sup> Here Carroll presents one of the most moving images in the novel: a

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<sup>36</sup>In *Lewis Carroll Observed*, Edward Guiliano calls this scene "the saddest passage in *Through the Looking-Glass*" and notes that "[s]uch quivering at the precise moment of change from innocence to commitment, from childhood to adulthood, is seen as the

child as blissfully unaware of the irreversible nature of her own promotion to queenhood, as she is of her own mortality and the approaching spectres of adulthood, old age, and death.<sup>37</sup>

Alice soon finds herself back in the shop, and although it appears that she now has the opportunity to purchase something, her ability to choose is again undermined. Alice wants to buy an egg, but here the process is not as straightforward as it is on the other side of the Looking-Glass:

‘Then two are cheaper than one?’ Alice said in a surprised tone, taking out her purse.

‘Only you *must* eat them both, if you buy two,’ said the sheep.

‘Then I’ll have *one*, please,’ said Alice, as she put the money down on the counter. For she thought to herself, ‘They mightn’t be at all nice, you know.’ (183)

Alice is confronted with a similar riddle to the one she imposes upon *The Walrus and the Carpenter*: the choice between two equally unpleasant alternatives. It seems that purchasing two eggs is preferable to purchasing one because it is much cheaper to do so, but the threat of having to eat both and so potentially swallow down a rotten egg provokes her into making the more expensive purchase. While it appears that she is finally allowed to make a choice here, her ability to choose is shown to be only an illusion because she is unable to get hold of the egg:

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first step to decay, which once taken is irreversible" (176). Carroll makes perhaps his gloomiest pun in either of the *Alice* books in his use of the "rushes" which, once picked, rush towards their own decay. In addition, rush candles are made by dipping the pith of a rush in tallow, and the Tweedle Twins threaten Alice with going out like a candle if she wakes the Red King from his dream.

<sup>37</sup>The reader will recall that in the Looking-Glass garden, the Rose thinks Alice is a flower who has been plucked from bed, telling her that she is "beginning to fade...and then one ca'n't help one's petals getting a little untidy" (141).

The Sheep took the money, and put it away in a box: then she said 'I never put things into people's hands--that would never do--you must get it for yourself.' And so saying, she went off to the other end of the shop, and set the egg upright on a shelf. 'I wonder *why* it wouldn't do?' thought Alice, as she groped her way among the tables and chairs, for the shop was very dark towards the end. 'The egg seems to get further away the more I walk towards it'. (183-84)<sup>38</sup>

Not surprisingly, Alice is ultimately deprived of her purchase because the egg turns into Humpty Dumpty, who subsequently tumbles from the wall and shatters on the ground.

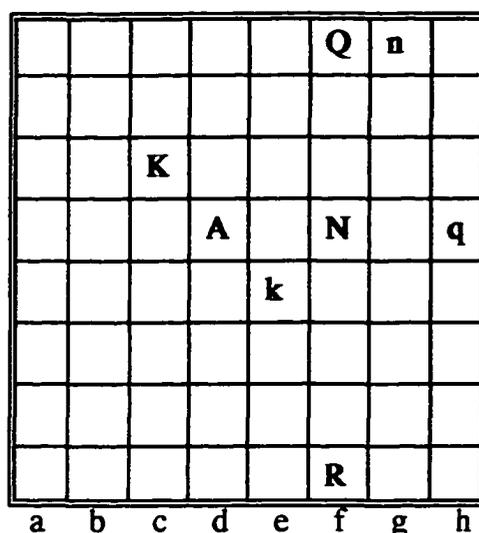


Figure 14. The Sixth Move: 6. Qf8

With respect to the strategies of orthodox chess, this move by the Queen-in-Sheep's-Clothing would represent yet another critical mistake, since it misses checkmates at e3 and d4. In both cases, the Queen would be protected by the White Knight on f5 and therefore immune from the threat of capture. However, the fact that the White Queen's knowledge of the current position is so limited warrants such play. Presumably, the locations of Alice on d5 and the White King on c6 block the White Queen's vision

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<sup>38</sup>Alice forgets that she should walk away from the egg in order to retrieve it.

and movement along both the Fifth Rank and the Queen Bishop's File. None of the Red pieces appear to have seen Alice make her previous move, and so there is nothing to prevent the White Queen from making yet another consecutive move for her side. One wonders, however, if the move is less important as a strategic component of the chess game than as a Looking-Glass reflection of the Red Queen's first move in *The Garden of Live Flowers*. The White Queen moves three squares diagonally from c5 to f8, tracing a path along the a3-f8 dark square diagonal, while the Red Queen travels from e2 to h5 along the d1-h5 light square diagonal.

#### 5.10. The Sheep Is (Not) a Beh-hh-Shop

As Alice pursues the elusive Humpty Dumpty egg, the reader is similarly in pursuit of an explanation as to why the Sheep is given in the *Dramatis Personae* as the White Queen's Bishop. The relationship is perplexing because technically the Sheep is not a Bishop at all, but the morphed White Queen who assumes this form while on the c5 square: "'Oh, much better!' cried the Queen, her voice rising into a squeak as she went on. 'Much be-etter! Be-etter! Be-e-e-etter! Be-e-ehh!' The last word ended in a long bleat, so like a sheep that Alice quite started. She looked at the Queen, who seemed to have suddenly wrapped herself up in wool" (178). Initially, it appears that the only way to explain Carroll's relationship of the Sheep to a Bishop is that the transformed White Queen moves like one after she leaves the shop. However, he seems to imply that this is not the case in the instructions that accompany his prefatory chess diagram. Here he describes the current move as: "W. Q. to Q. B's 5th (*becomes Sheep*)" (114). Francis Huxley attempts to defend the *Dramatis Personae* by recognizing a

curious linguistic association: "The Sheep is what happened when the White Queen cried, 'Oh, much better!...Much be-etter! Be-etter! Be-e-e-etter! Be-e-ehh!' so that she at least starts off like a Bishop" (Huxley 28). This seems to require a logical leap-of-faith until we recognize that the last place this creature is seen is in the shop, so that it can be said to start with a "Be-e-ehh" and end in a "shop," or "Be-e-ehh-shop" giving us "Bishop." Thus the Sheep is both a Bishop and not a Bishop, another Carrollian example of the kind of strange loop that lies in store for Alice on the Eighth Square, where promotion gives her freedom of action and in the very same moment, denies it to her.

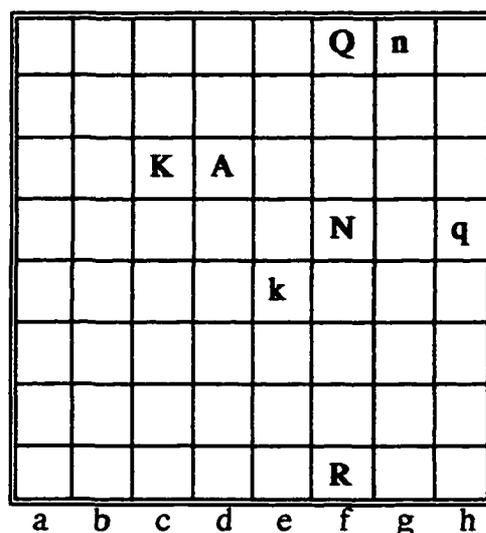


Figure 15. The Seventh Move: 7. d6

Alice quickly, but also somewhat confusedly, makes yet another consecutive move for the White pieces by crossing over into the Sixth Square. It seems odd that the Red Knight does not decide to move at this point because the White Queen passes through e7, a square which he controls, on her way to f8. However, the problem facing the Knight is that the White Queen is now positioned beside him and guards all of his potential escape squares: e7, f6, and h6. Corralled in this manner, he is apparently content to

remain where he is. In a normal contest between two players, White would have a much better series of moves beginning with a Queen check at b4, but in the current game Alice moves to the d6 square immediately after the Sheep disappears and this cuts off the a3-f8 diagonal.<sup>39</sup>

### 5.11. Eggs and Impenetrability

The inevitability of Alice's regimented journey towards promotion and the acute sense of disappointment it brings are perhaps nowhere better encapsulated than in her encounter with Humpty Dumpty. When Alice crosses the brook into the Sixth Square and confronts the elusive egg that she purchased in the shop, she can not help repeating the nursery rhyme to herself. Indeed, Humpty Dumpty's fate is sealed, regardless of his absolute assurance to the contrary, and both Alice and the reader know full well the outcome of this encounter because they have previously "read it in a book" (187). Just as Humpty Dumpty's illusion of security is both literally and metaphorically shattered into pieces by his tumble from the wall, so is Alice's illusion of autonomy shattered when her promotion to a Queen does not afford her the social power she assumed was concomitant with acquiring her golden crown.

The notion that Alice is unable to prevent what lies in store for her is grimly mirrored in her conversation with Humpty Dumpty about the subject of age: "I never ask advice about growing," Alice said indignantly. "Too proud?" the other enquired.

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<sup>39</sup>In an orthodox chess game, the players would not have to worry about the Red King's recursive dream, and so after 7. Qb4+ there would follow 7. ...Kd3 (if 7. ...Ke5 then 8. Qd4#), 8. Qd4+ Kc2 (if 8. ...Ke2 then 9. Qd1#), 9. Rf2+ Kb3 (if 9. ...Kb1 then 10. Qb2# and if 9. ...Kc1 then 10. Qa1#), 10. Rb2+ Ka3, 11. Qb4#

Alice felt even more indignant at this suggestion. 'I mean,' she said, 'that one ca'n't help growing older.' '*One* ca'n't, perhaps,' said Humpty Dumpty, 'but *two* can. With proper assistance, you might have left off at seven'" (188). Like no other moment in the novel, Alice refuses to heed the precepts of Looking-Glass logic--she threatens to be completely autonomous by ignoring the advice offered to her--and Humpty Dumpty reacts with a threat that leaves little doubt as to its sinister intentions: As Gardner notes, "this is the subtlest, grimmest, easiest-to-miss quip in the *Alice* books. No wonder that Alice, quick to catch an implication, changes the subject" (Gardner, *AA* 266). Nowhere is Alice's fundamental inability to make crucial decisions more acutely revealed; she chooses either to play along as her insidious social conditioning has taught her or to accept the dreadful consequences of the "proper assistance" that is offered.

Humpty Dumpty is also exceedingly clever in the way he lures Alice into one of his nonsense games and then changes the rules when she is on the verge of finding her way through his logic. For example, he attempts to convince Alice that "Unbirthday presents" are better than birthday presents because there are more days of the year on which to receive them, but when she remains unconvinced, he begins to throw obstacles in her way by forcing her to do subtraction, and when this does not work, by imperceptibly switching to a complicated Looking-Glass game of word definitions:

'As I was saying, that *seems* to be done right--though I haven't had time to look it over thoroughly just now--and that shows that there are three hundred and sixty-four days when you might get un-birthday presents--'

'Certainly,' said Alice.

'And only *one* for birthday presents, you know. There's glory for you!'

'I don't know what you mean by "glory,"' Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. 'Of course you don't--till I tell you. I meant "there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'" (190)

Humpty Dumpty's highly "unsatisfactory" treatment of Alice mirrors her treatment by the two Queens once she has reached the Eighth Square. Whenever it suits him, Humpty Dumpty simply switches games and Alice is forced to keep up with him in precisely the same manner that she physically struggles to keep up with the swift-footed Queens when still a pawn, and intellectually struggles to overcome their Looking-Glass logic puzzles when they begin administering their examinations.

Humpty Dumpty's explanation of the "Jabberwocky" poem is important not only in what it reveals about Alice's frustrated search for autonomy, but in what it says about the reader's position as a participant in the author's cleverly constructed game. When Alice reads the poem for the first time in Looking-Glass House, she recognizes that despite not understanding some of the more difficult vocabulary, she knows for certain "*somebody killed something*" (136). The reader has the same initial reaction to the poem; although Carroll's verse is filled with a variety of nonsense words, "Jabberwocky" nonetheless appears to tell the story of how a young boy heroically slays a creature called the "Jabberwock" and returns home with the creature's head to the praises of his adoring father. However, as Patricia Meyer Spacks notes in "Logic and Language in *Through the Looking-Glass*" (1961), when Humpty Dumpty begins explaining the poem, he turns it from heroic verse into grotesque farce:

In this interpretation of "Jabberwocky"...Humpty Dumpty shows that the satirist can find a target also in the effort to insist upon exactness. The poem, itself, of course, is presented for Alice's mystification in the opening pages of the book. "Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas," she says, "--only I don't exactly know what they are!" Humpty Dumpty has no such problem. When Alice asks him for an interpretation of the first stanza, he finds no difficulty attaching precise meanings to each word: "Well, '*outgribing*' is something between bellowing and whistling,

with a kind of sneeze in the middle." But his interpretation--reducing the splendid stanza to an account of animals resembling badgers, lizards, and corkscrews, going through various gyrations in the plot of land around a sundial during the part of the afternoon when one begins broiling things for dinner--destroys the poem. One can hardly think of these grotesque animals and their sundial while appreciating the masterful narrative poetry of "Jabberwocky": it is an interpretation forgotten as soon as it is read. Surely, the filling of the head with cloudy ideas is a higher poetic achievement than the reduction of these ideas to the ridiculous. (271)

Indeed, Humpty Dumpty's systematic interpretation of "Jabberwocky"--coupled with Tenniel's surreal illustration--transforms the pleasant confusion of the poem's ambiguous signifiers into nothing more than a Dodgsonian exercise in word definitions. Indeed, Humpty Dumpty interprets the poem with annoying exactness. The opening phrase, "Twas brillig," no longer conveys undefined time, but instead denotes a specific time: "four in the afternoon." The "slithy toves" are not the mysterious creatures of the poem's first reading, but the lithe and active cheese-eating badger-lizard-corkscrew hybrids that nest under sun-dials. In giving his interpretation of the poem, Humpty Dumpty makes Carroll's point while missing it himself: the power of the poem, like that of the chess game, derives not from attempts to impose an absolute meaning upon it, but from the precarious position in which it places the reader as critical interpreter. In turn, this precariousness encourages us to sympathize with Alice, and to understand both how easily her desperate search for meaning fosters her participation in Humpty Dumpty's game, and how easily our own search for meaning keeps us playing Carroll's.

Apart from his numerous occupations as poet, critic, logician, and braggart, Humpty Dumpty is also apparently involved in the chess game; however, if the Red Queen is correct in telling Alice that "the Sixth Square belongs to [him]" (146), then this

appears to remove any possibility that he is currently serving as the Red Queen's Rook. From d6, Humpty Dumpty would check the White King at c6, necessitating the latter's movement sometime during the course of the game, but we know that the White King never moves from c6 because Carroll does not indicate this in his solution to the chess problem. On a symbolic level, however, Carroll's association of Humpty Dumpty with the Rook piece makes sense in that the latter's nonsense word games serve as a barrier for Alice, much as he himself would if he were blockading her path to the Queening Square:

‘Impenetrability! That's what *I* say!’  
 ‘Would you tell me, please,’ said Alice, ‘what that means?’  
 ‘Now you talk like a reasonable child,’ said Humpty Dumpty, looking very much pleased. ‘I meant by “impenetrability” that we've had enough of that subject, and it would be just as well if you'd mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don't mean to stop here all the rest of your life.’ (191)

Curiously, Tenniel's illustration conveys the sense that Alice is confronting physical impenetrability—a wall that she can not see over and which seems to bar her progress—as though Humpty Dumpty really is a kind of Rook after all.

#### 5.12. All the King's Horses and All the King's Men

When Humpty Dumpty falls from his perch, Alice is forced to take cover behind a tree “for fear of being run over” by all of the foot-soldiers and horses that come to his rescue. The narrative description of this scene and Tenniel's somewhat disturbing illustration evoke the sense of confusion and disorientation that are at the heart of Alice's journey across each square of Looking-Glass land:

She thought that in all her life she had never seen soldiers so uncertain on their feet: they were always tripping over something or other,

and whenever one went down, several more always fell over him, so that the ground was soon covered with little heaps of men.

Then came the horses. Having four feet, these managed rather better than the foot-soldiers; but even *they* stumbled now and then; and it seemed to be a regular rule that, whenever a horse stumbled, the rider fell off instantly. The confusion got worse every moment, and Alice was very glad to get out of the wood into an open place, where she found the White King seated on the ground, busily writing in his memorandum book. (198)

Like the White King's soldiers who become grotesquely entangled in their efforts to put Humpty Dumpty back together, Alice is similarly prevented from achieving self-directed action because she becomes trapped within her search to be free of the incomprehensible rules that govern her position in both the Looking-Glass chess problem and the larger game it symbolizes. Tenniel's disturbing juxtaposition of soldiers, horses, and weapons might easily be mistaken as an illustration of the remnants of some chaotic battle, and it is precisely this sense of chaos that serves to destabilize our own privileged perspective as readers and encourages us to identify with Alice.

Soon after Alice meets the White King, she is introduced to Haigha and Hatta, the Anglo-Saxon messengers whom the reader recognizes from Tenniel's illustrations as the March Hare and the Mad Hatter. Although the *Dramatis Personae* lists them as White's Knight pawns, they can not currently be part of the chess game because in the present position, the locations of Alice and the White King would leave only the e6 square for his two servants. Carroll's associations initially seem dubious in that they elicit a couple of uncomfortable questions: (1) How could Hatta have begun the game for the White side

if he was only recently released from prison?<sup>40</sup> (2) How can Haigha and Hatta be pawns if the King has sent them into town and they are now returning? Their movement violates the fact that pawns can only travel in one basic direction. And yet for all this, it still makes sense for Carroll to draw an association between the King's messengers and the chess game, for not only do their Anglo-Saxon attitudes appear to echo the equally awkward movements of the other White pieces in the game, but in serving their King, Haigha and Hatta are vigorously put through their paces in the same way that Alice is forced to undergo physical and intellectual exhaustion by the various characters she meets.

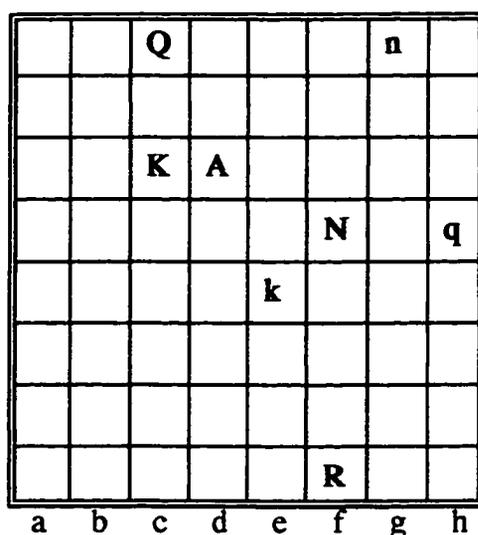


Figure 16. The Eighth Move: 8. Qc8

The White Queen's move to c8 appears to be as perplexing as those that have gone before it because not only do the White pieces continue to play out of turn, but the

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<sup>40</sup>Once again, the text revisits the themes of imprisonment and isolation on which Alice reflects momentarily in the opening chapter of the novel: "'Were you happy in prison, dear child?' said Haigha. Hatta looked round once more, and this time a tear or two trickled down his cheek; but not a word he would say" (203).

Queen herself once again neglects the capture of the Red Knight on g8. However, from the Queen's point of view, the move is entirely logical because she is presumably still unaware of the Red Queen's current location when she begins her move. Although this is the seventh consecutive move for the White pieces, it is really no surprise as Alice's move to d6 is played without the knowledge of any of the Red pieces (none of them presently holds influence over the d6 square). However, the initial paradox of 8. Qc8 is that Alice is able to see the White Queen as she scurries across the countryside

For a minute or two Alice stood silent, watching him. Suddenly she brightened up. 'Look, look!' she cried, pointing eagerly. 'There's the White Queen running across the country! She came flying out of the wood over yonder--How fast those Queens *can* run!' 'There's some enemy after her, no doubt,' the King said, without even looking round. 'That wood's full of them.' (204)

Carroll temporarily foregoes limiting Alice's small scope--apparently for the purpose of foreshadowing her imminent promotion--by having her spot the White Queen as the latter passes through the d8 square. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the fact that the White King does not see the Queen's movement; he is described as not bothering to look around but this only hides the fact that he could not see the Queen even if he did look. His limited awareness and movement restrictions prevent him from doing anything about the situation: "'But aren't you going to run and help her?' Alice asked, very much surprised at his taking it so quietly. 'No use, no use!' said the King. 'She runs so fearfully quick. You might as well try to catch a Bandersnatch!'" (204).

### 5.13. On the Sixth Square, Things Are as Difficult as Pie

Like Alice's encounter with Tweedledum and Tweedledee, and her experiences with Humpty Dumpty, the episode with the Lion and the Unicorn reinforces the idea that

events in Looking-Glass land are predetermined and unchangeable, and that no matter how desperately Alice searches for autonomy, she will always find that the ability to control things lies just beyond her reach. For instance, despite Alice's efforts to make them feel petty and ashamed, Tweedledum and Tweedledee fight over the broken rattle and are both eventually scared away by the Crow, precisely as it is dictated by the nursery rhyme. Similarly, Alice can not dissuade Humpty Dumpty from maintaining his precarious perch, nor is she in any position to put him back together once he has crashed to the ground. The present episode is no different; Alice comes upon the Lion and the Unicorn "fighting for the crown" and finds that all of the characters participate in ensuring that the poem is carried out to the letter:

There was a pause in the fight just then, and the Lion and the Unicorn sat down, panting, while the King called out 'Ten minutes allowed for refreshments!' Haigha and Hatta set to work at once, carrying round trays of white and brown bread. Alice took a piece to taste, but it was *very* dry.

'I don't think they'll fight any more today,' the King said to Hatta: 'go and order the drums to begin.' And Hatta went bounding away like a grasshopper. (204)

Although the events of this episode are predetermined, things are not any easier for Alice. She still finds herself having problems when it comes to cutting and distributing Looking-Glass plum cake and is forced to endure criticism from the other characters for holding things up: "What a time the Monster is, cutting up that cake!" (207). The Lion and the Unicorn are perhaps not as nasty to Alice as some of the other Looking-Glass characters, but they have no qualms about forcing her to assume a subservient role.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Like Humpty Dumpty and the Tweedle Twins, the Lion and the Unicorn are listed in the *Dramatis Personae*, although they no longer appear to be involved in the

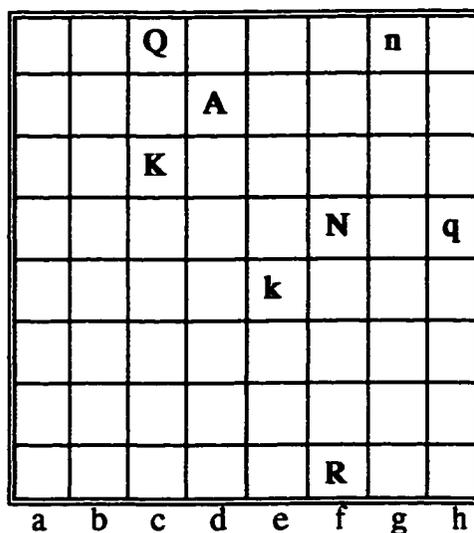


Figure 17. The Ninth Move: 9. d7

Once the Lion and the Unicorn are "drummed out of town," the reader watches as Alice makes the last in a series of eight consecutive moves by the White pieces. This

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Looking-Glass chess game. As the Red King's Rook, the Lion would not only face the impossibility of sharing a single square of the chessboard with three enemy pieces—the Unicorn, Haigha, and Hatta—but it would be placing a permanent check on the White King at c6 once Humpty Dumpty falls from his perch. Also, Alice would be unable to effect the checkmate that ends the game because this piece would be interposed between herself and the Red King. We know from the Nursery Rhyme that "*The Lion beat[s] the Unicorn all around the town*" (202), and this might account for Carroll associating these characters with a Rook and a Knight, but to assume that they are somehow currently involved in the game is dubious.

Initially, it seems appropriate to suggest that the Unicorn is currently involved in the game as one of the White Knights since it has the shape of the Staunton chess piece. However, apart from this there is nothing to warrant consideration of the Unicorn as the current White Queen's Knight. First, the Unicorn does not mimic the movement of the other White Knight, whose numerous tumbles from his horse are much like a chess knight's L-shaped movement (Gardner, AA 179). Second, why is the Unicorn locked in a battle with the Lion for the White King's crown if it is a member of the White side and can not hope to gain anything by being victorious? Last, when Alice meets the White King, the latter mentions that he did not "send all the horses [to Humpty Dumpty's rescue] because two of them are wanted in the game" (198). Gardner correctly observes that the King does so because two horses are needed as steeds for the White Knights (Gardner, AA 279). However, it seems logical to ask the question that if the Unicorn is really one of the White Knights, why does it need a horse for a mount? It is a mount!

move neglects the wins afforded by 9. Ng3+ winning the Queen, or 9. Qd6+ Kd3, 10. Qb3+, but does not force the Red King to wake up. It seems strange that no Red piece moves at this point, but perhaps a tentative explanation can be found by examining the current position of the board. Although the White Queen's journey to c8 cuts through the Red Queen's area of awareness, the latter has her reasons for remaining on h5. The Red Queen can not know for certain whether the White Queen has moved to d8, c8, b8 or a8, let alone whether or not she has managed to check the Red King. Thus, from this perspective, she may not feel that she is in any position to move. The Red Knight does not move at this point because the White Queen's movement to c8 does not cut across e7, f6, or h6, and so he has to assume that the Queen is still on f8. When Alice spots the White Queen running for c8, she is already in the process of moving through the Sixth Square and does not bother to consider whether she is playing out of turn.

#### 5.14. The Clumsy Chauffeur

Having reached the forests of the Seventh Square, Alice begins to reflect on whether she is the one dreaming her Looking-Glass adventures, or whether it is all the Red King's dream: "'So I wasn't dreaming, after all,' she said to herself, 'unless—unless we're all part of the same dream. Only I do hope it's *my* dream, and not the Red King's! I don't like belonging to another person's dream,' she went on in a rather complaining tone: 'I've a great mind to go wake him, and see what happens!'" (Carroll 209). Once again, Alice demonstrates a fundamental lack of understanding concerning her position as a pawn in the game, because the rules governing Alice's movement do not permit her to retrace her steps back to the Fourth Square. Furthermore, in order to wake up the Red

King (if such a thing is possible), Alice would be forced to lay hold of him, and even the unorthodox rules of Looking-Glass chess do not appear to allow the removal of a King from the board.

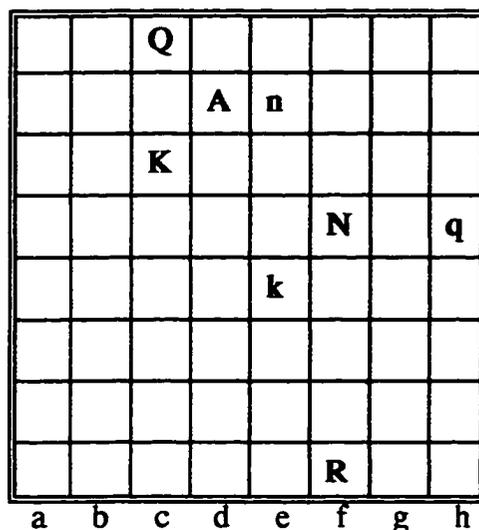


Figure 18. The Tenth Move: 9. ...Ne7+

While Alice engages in these metaphysical deliberations, the Red Knight finally avails himself of the opportunity to move by playing 9. ...Ne7+ and declaring Alice to be his prisoner. This seems nothing short of dreadful because the Knight does not threaten Alice's capture and simply exposes himself to his White counterpart. The Red Knight's actions also lead us to speculate whether he knows of Alice's location when he begins his move or merely stumbles upon her and believes that she is in fact in the square he now occupies. His move also checks the White King and royally forks both the King and Queen, but unfortunately, the Red Knight realizes too late that the White Knight guards the e7 square. However, 9. ...Ne7+ makes sense from the standpoint that it follows a few basic principles of chess play. The Red Knight doubles the number of

squares over which he holds sway by transferring himself to e7.<sup>4</sup> On this square, he overlooks c8, c6, d5, f5, g6, and g8. Also, by moving into Alice's scope, the Red Knight frightens the young girl by threatening her with capture, and so temporarily halts her progress towards the queening square.

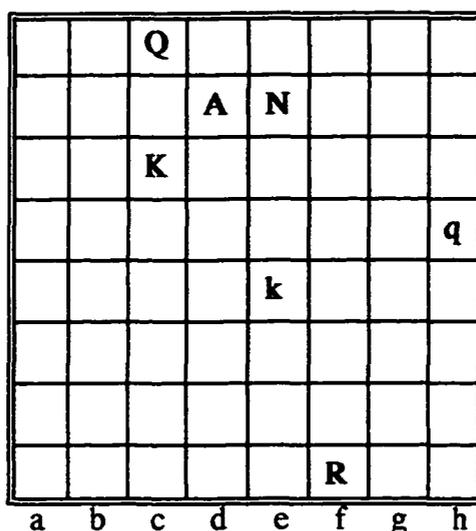


Figure 19. The Eleventh Move: 10. Nxe7

As soon as he was comfortably in the saddle, he began once more 'You're my--' but here another voice broke in 'Ahoy! Ahoy! Check!' and Alice looked round in some surprise for the new enemy.

This time it was a White Knight. He drew up at Alice's side, and tumbled off his horse just as the Red Knight had done: then he got on again, and the two Knights sat and looked at each other for some time without speaking. Alice looked from one to the other in some bewilderment.

'She's *my* prisoner, you know!' the Red Knight said at last.

'Yes, but then *I* came and rescued her!' the White Knight replied.

'Well, we must fight for her then,' said the Red Knight as he took up his helmet (which hung from the saddle, and was something the shape of a horse's head) and put it on. (209-10)

The White Knight has played a very sound move here with 10. Nxe7. Hearing screams

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<sup>4</sup>See Appendix 3 for an explanation of how moving towards the centre increases a Knight's effectiveness.

of "Check!" from his crimson counterpart, the White Knight feels compelled to remove the threat from e7, and subsequently aid in ushering the Alice pawn to d8. The White Knight is not so ludicrous as he may seem in crying "Check!" himself, for although he does not effect a check, his inability to know the current position of the Red King makes this an honourable gesture. Although the Red Queen might have noticed the White Knight's movement from the f5 square, the fact that he is crying "Check!" prevents her from taking any action. The Red Queen does not have influence over e7, and can therefore do nothing to prevent what she must only assume is an actual check by the White Knight.

The battle in which the Red and White Knights engage on the e7-square serves as an appropriate metaphor for the paradox of Alice's steady-but-frustrated progress through Looking-Glass land. The Punch-and-Judy-style duel is strictly regimented, and both participants are forced to adhere to a designated set of understood, albeit ludicrous, rules: "One Rule seems to be, that if one of the Knights hits the other, he knocks him off his horse; and, if he misses, he tumbles off himself'...Another Rule of Battle, that Alice had not noticed, seemed to be that they always fell on their heads; and that the battle ended with their both falling off in this way, side by side" (210-11). Within the framework of this regimented structure, however, the actual fighting is chaotic and violent, and Alice's response to it is reminiscent of her frightened reaction to the White King's entangled army bearing down upon her after Humpty Dumpty falls from his perch: "they began banging away at each other with such fury that Alice got behind a tree to be out of the way of the blows" (210). Alice can say that she "[does] not want to be anybody's

prisoner" (211), but she is physically unable to do anything to prevent the Knights from fighting over her, just as she is similarly powerless to prevent the Lion and the Unicorn from engaging in their battle for the crown or Tweedledum and Tweedledee from fighting over the broken rattle.

The figure of the White Knight has been frequently interpreted by literary scholars as a manifestation of Carroll—the bumbling yet sentimental old gentleman who proudly escorts Alice to the Queening Square—but the Knight's frustrated efforts to make sense of the world before him are also not unlike those of Alice and the reader. Indeed, he is as much the victim of Looking-Glass logic as Alice is, or as we are, for that matter. His numerous falls from his horse remind us of the many times that Carroll's strange universe unseats Alice's concerted efforts to understand it and our own attempts to systematize it. Furthermore, his ridiculous story about becoming hopelessly lost in his helmet similarly echoes how the text sets pitfalls which swallow even the most experienced or best equipped Looking-Glass traveller: "the worst of it was, before I could get out again, the other White Knight came and put it on...I had to kick him, of course,' the Knight said, very seriously. 'And then he took the helmet off again—but it took hours and hours to get me out. I was as fast—as lightning, you know" (216). The White Knight is constantly tripped up not because he is inordinately careless—he has had "plenty of practice," as he quickly assures Alice—but because he is simply fated to remain this way despite his efforts to improve: "I don't believe that pudding *ever* was cooked! In fact, I don't believe that pudding *ever* will be cooked! And yet it was a very clever pudding to invent'" (217).

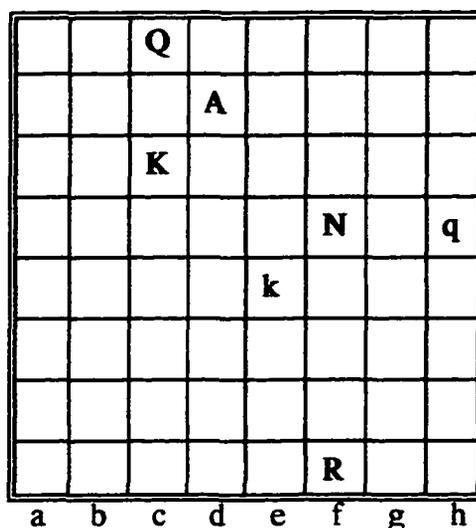


Figure 20. The Twelfth Move: 11. Nf5

The White Knight brings Alice to the border of the Eighth Square, but can not go across with her: "I'll see you safe to the end of the wood--and then I must go back, you know. That's the end of my move" (211). This move is puzzling, because although the Red pieces are prevented from moving, the Knight's retreat to f5 does not appear to accomplish anything.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately he does not know enough about the position to recognize that letting one of his fellow pieces move would prove to be a superior play. In a normal game, 11. Re1+ would be strong, since 11. ...Kd3 (or Kd4) runs into 12. d8=Q+ while flight to the f-file is greeted by 12. Qf8+. Perhaps more importantly, however, the Knight's farewell leaves Alice alone to face the Looking-Glass "examinations" awaiting her; ultimately, he is as powerless to prevent Alice's promotion and the unsatisfactory treatment she receives from the two Queens as Carroll is powerless to prevent his young friends from growing up and disappearing from his life.

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<sup>43</sup>Of course, the Knight's inventions fail to accomplish what he wants of them as well...

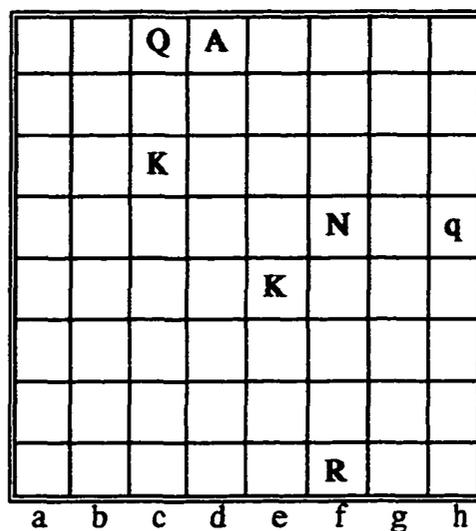


Figure 21. The Thirteenth Move: 12. d8=Q

Alice finally reaches the Eighth square and becomes a cherished Queen, although initially the experience seems to be somewhat disconcerting: "‘And what *is* this on my head?’ she exclaimed in a tone of dismay, as she put her hands up to something very heavy, that fitted tight all round her head. ‘But how *can* it have got there without my knowing it?’" (223). Since Alice’s move is made immediately after 11. Nf5—Alice waves goodbye to the Knight and then jumps over the remaining brook—the Red Queen is deprived of her turn. While the text move seems to be a strong one because it gains a second White Queen, Alice’s promotion once again demonstrates that the Looking-Glass pieces do not fully comprehend the nature of the position, since either 12. Ng3+ (winning the Red Queen) or 12. Qe8+ (exchanging Queens and promoting Alice on e8 with check) are superior. However, Alice does not know the current arrangement of the chess pieces and is further overwhelmed by the prospects of becoming a queen: "‘and now for the last brook, and to be a Queen! How grand it sounds!’ A very few steps brought her to the edge of the brook. ‘The Eighth Square at last!...Oh, how glad I am

to get here!’” (229).

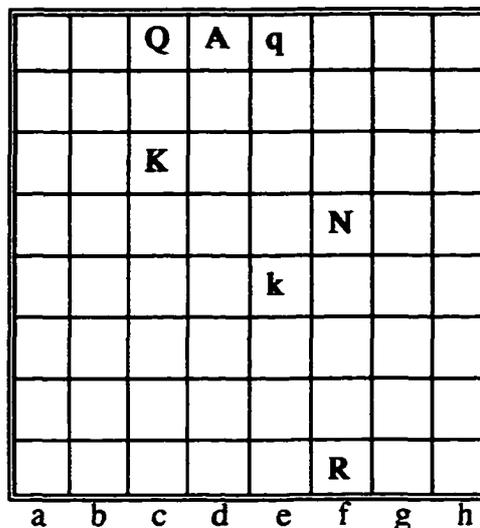


Figure 22. The Fourteenth Move: 12. ...Qe8+

We might imagine that when the White Knight leaves his outpost on f5 to capture his red counterpart, the Red Queen has an opportunity to peer down the length of the fifth rank. Seeing no enemy King, the Queen realizes that she did not previously hold the White Knight in a pin. Needing to find the enemy king, and uncertain as to what fate has befallen the Red Knight, the Red Queen makes her way to the Eighth rank with 12. ...Qe8+. However, when she begins her move, she has no way of telling if Alice has queened. Although she checks the White King on c6, the Queen exposes herself to capture by Alice, who has just gained her additional powers.

#### 5.15. So, You Want to Be a Queen...

Throughout the course of her adventures, Alice has been guided by the assumption that reaching the Eighth Square will see her acquire the Looking-Glass abilities of the Red and White Queens. However, when Alice notices that the Queens have appeared beside her and enquires whether or not the game is over, she is rebuked for speaking out of

turn: "‘Speak when you’re spoken to!’ the Queen sharply interrupted her" (124). Alice endeavours to stand up for herself by exposing the ludicrousness of the Red Queen’s argument, but her victory is only temporary, and as with her experiences in the Garden of Live Flowers and aboard the Looking-Glass train, it only takes a few moments for her to be thrown back onto the defensive:

‘But if everybody obeyed that rule,’ said Alice, who was always ready for a little argument, ‘and if you only spoke when you were spoken to, and the other person always waited for *you* to begin, you see nobody would ever say anything, so that—’

‘Ridiculous!’ cried the Queen. ‘Why, don’t you see, child’ here she broke off with a frown, and, after thinking for a minute, suddenly changed the subject of the conversation. ‘What do you mean by "If you really are a Queen"? What right have you to call yourself so? You ca’n’t be a Queen, you know, till you’ve passed the proper examination. And the sooner we begin it, the better.’

‘I only said "if"!’ poor Alice pleaded in a piteous tone (225)

Like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the Queens effectively intimidate Alice, checking her attempts to enter the conversation and putting her down whenever she asks a question or makes a suggestion. Throughout this scene, and indeed throughout the entire chapter, the various mistreatments which Alice has suffered during her adventures are played over again one last time. For example, the Queens begin talking to one another about Alice as though she is not present, just as the Paper Man and the Goat do aboard the Looking-Glass train in Chapter III:

The Red Queen broke the silence by saying, to the White Queen, ‘I invite you to Alice’s dinner-party this afternoon.’

The White Queen smiled feebly, and said ‘And I invite *you*.’

‘I didn’t know I was to have a party at all,’ said Alice; ‘but, if there *is* one, I think *I* ought to invite the guests.’

‘We gave you the opportunity of doing it,’ the Red Queen remarked: ‘but I daresay you’ve not had many lessons in manners yet?’ (225)

Here the sense of frustration is all the more acute because Alice is forced to endure such treatment despite the fact that she is now supposed to be a Queen. Indeed, Tenniel's two illustrations of the three Queens together capture Alice's abject disappointment, her downcast eyes suggesting she has come to the realization that despite the "feasting and fun" promised to her in the Garden of Live Flowers, things have not changed at all.

If the first part of Alice's "examination" requires that she be put down for her inappropriate manners, part two is a Looking-Glass mathematics quiz designed specifically to confound her.<sup>44</sup> The questions asked of Alice are unfair, even by Looking-Glass standards, and the manner in which her responses are summarily dismissed shows that her examination is nothing more than a mean-spirited interrogation:

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"Dodgson's occupation as a mathematics lecturer at Oxford gave him an understanding of the difficulties students encounter in learning an often abstract subject, and he endeavoured to teach more advanced concepts by structuring them as games. His attempts were not always successful—especially in the case of his infamous *Game of Logic*--but students were often impressed with the sheer enjoyment that Dodgson derived from showing them his most recent strategy for solving an equation or his latest discovery in the area of syllogisms. There is a point, however, to the examination that is conducted by the two Queens. Because a pawn can be promoted to either a Knight, Bishop, Rook, or Queen, a player must conduct a proper examination of the position in order to determine which piece is to replace the pawn. To the novice, it might seem ridiculous to promote the pawn to anything but a queen since it is the most powerful piece, but there are certain positions in which promoting to a Knight, Bishop, or Rook is crucial. For instance, take the following examples: (A) White: Ka8, pb7; Black: Kc6, Nc4, Qd7. With White to move, 1. b8=Q?? loses to 1. ...Nb6+, 2. Qxb6+ (forced) Kxb6, 3. Kb8 Qd8#. However, 1. b8=N+! draws since after 1. ...Kc7, 2. Nxd7 Kxd7, Black does not have sufficient material to mate. (B) White: Kh5, Bf6, pe7; Black Kh7, ph6. Here, 1. e8=Q or R?? is stalemate because the five squares available to the Black King are all guarded. Best is 1. e8=B Kg8 (forced), 2. Kxh6 Kf8, 3. Bg6 Kg8, 4. Be7 Kh8, 5. Bb1! Kg8, 6. Ba2+ Kh8, 7. Bf6#. (C) White: Kf6, pf7; Black: Kh7. In this position, 1. f8=Q?? is stalemate since the Black King is unable to move and yet not in check. Promoting to a Bishop or a Knight is similarly useless since this leaves White without mating material. The correct move is 1. f8=R!, and after 1. ...Kh6, 2. Rh8#.

'Can you do Addition?' the White Queen asked. 'What's one and one?'

'I don't know,' said Alice, 'I lost count.'

'She ca'n't do Addition,' the Red Queen interrupted. 'Can you do subtraction? Take nine from eight.'

'Nine from eight I ca'n't, you know,' Alice replied very readily: 'but--'

'She ca'n't do Substraction,' said the White Queen. 'Can you do Division? Divide a loaf by a knife--what's the answer to *that*?' (22)

Humpty Dumpty seems somewhat brutish when he forces Alice to calculate the number of unbirthdays in a year, but here she is given a series of trick questions so that no matter how she responds, the Queens are able to find fault with her. Alice gives a valid reply to the White Queen's addition question by claiming that she has lost count of all the "ones," but the difficulty of the question rests in the fact that there is more than one way to answer it. One answer works by simple addition: by adding the "ones" together we arrive at a sum of ten. However, a second answer can be derived by looking a bit more carefully at what the White Queen asks Alice: "What's one and one?" The fact that the Queen uses the word "and" and not "plus" implies that another reasonable answer to her question is a number composed of ten "ones," or 1,111,111,111. This is hardly "feasting and fun."

The Red Queen's subtraction question relies on a similar kind of deception. The most logical answer is "-1," but as any nineteenth-century Oxford mathematician would tell you, this is only valid if one is operating within a system in which negative integers exist. For instance, if we let  $x$  and  $y$  be elements of the Natural number system (0, 1, 2, 3...) and let  $z = x - y$ , then if  $x > y$ ,  $z$  is an element of  $N$ , but if  $x < y$ ,  $z$  is not an element of  $N$  and, as far as  $N$  is concerned,  $z$  does not exist. In effect, the Red Queen

orders Alice to do the Looking-Glass opposite of what Humpty Dumpty had previously asked of her, namely to calculate a difference that is equal to subtracting the number of days in the year from the number of unbirthdays. This answer has theoretical value, but in terms of a system of tangible quantities, it is useless. Alice does not understand the context of the Queen's question any more than she can make sense of the chess game in which she is playing, and therefore she can not hope to give the "correct" response that is expected of her.

The White Queen's question about dividing a loaf by a knife and the Red Queen's "Subtraction sum" concerning the taking of a bone from a dog also have a number of possible answers. Depending upon one's perspective, dividing a loaf by a knife yields a sliced loaf, or two halves of one loaf, or two loaves, or if you will, "Bread and butter." Although Alice is rudely interrupted in the course of giving her response, it makes little difference what she was trying to say, as we see from the conversation that develops around the next question:

'Take a bone from a dog: what remains?'

Alice considered. 'The bone wouldn't remain, of course, if I took it--and the dog wouldn't remain: it would come to bite me--and I'm sure I shouldn't remain!'

'Then you think nothing would remain?' said the Red Queen.

'I think that's the answer.'

'Wrong, as usual,' said the Red Queen: 'the dog's temper would remain.'

'But I don't see how--'

'Why, look here!' the Red Queen cried. 'The dog would lose its temper, wouldn't it?'

'Perhaps it would,' Alice replied cautiously.

'Then if the dog went away, its temper would remain!' the Queen exclaimed triumphantly.

Alice said, as gravely as she could, 'They might go different ways.' But she couldn't help thinking to herself 'What dreadful nonsense

we *are* talking!' (227)

Although Alice considers the question thoughtfully and gives a valid reply, she is nonetheless chastised and told that "She ca'n't do sums a *bit!*" (227). Just as the Red Queen avoids having the Red King checkmated by initiating Alice's Looking-Glass journey along the d-file, now she similarly checks the young girl's progress by intentionally leading her down a deliberately confusing path.

The interrogation continues with the Queens demanding that Alice be able to answer "useful questions," but in typical Looking-Glass fashion, she is unable to utter more than a few syllables of a response before it is met with a host of additional queries. As Alice tries to explain how bread is made, the White Queen asks her questions that bring the discussion further and further away from the original subject of conversation, so that the initial question never has an opportunity to get answered.

'How is bread made?'

'I know *that!*' Alice cried eagerly. 'You take some flour--'

'Where do you pick the flower?' the White Queen asked 'In a garden or in the hedges?'

'Well, it isn't *picked* at all,' Alice explained: 'it's ground--'

'How many acres of ground?' said the White Queen. 'You mustn't leave out so many things.'

'Fan her head!' the Red Queen anxiously interrupted 'She'll be feverish after so much thinking.' (227)

Like a good chess player, Alice believes that she can "leave out" irrelevant details because they can cloud the assessment of a position, but the Queens expect her to consider every line of play, however ridiculous, so that everything becomes "exactly like

a riddle with no answer" (229).<sup>45</sup>

The characterizations of the Red and White Queens throughout this chapter, and indeed throughout the course of the novel, seem to suggest there are two separate approaches that Alice may take to her promotion and the coming of age it symbolizes: either to admit that she belongs to a "weaker sex" by acknowledging that she can do absolutely nothing for herself, like the White Queen, or to domineer over her social inferiors in order to have the illusion of being in control, like the Red Queen:

‘Your majesty must excuse her,’ the Red Queen said to Alice, taking one of the White Queen’s hands in her own, and gently stroking it: ‘she means well, but she ca’n’t help saying foolish things, as a general rule.’

The White Queen looked timidly at Alice, who felt she *ought* to say something kind, but really couldn’t think of anything at the moment.

‘She never was really well brought up,’ the Red Queen went on: ‘but it’s amazing how good-tempered she is! Pat her on the head, and see how pleased she’ll be!’ But this was more than Alice had courage to do. (229)

However, the Red Queen is no more in control of things than the White Queen: both have an incomplete understanding of the Looking-Glass chess game and both are forced

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<sup>45</sup>There are numerous stories of players who have lost crucial games because they have left a piece *en prise* after getting sidetracked by some false or speculative line of play. As Edward Brace observes, "This type of chess blindness can occur at all levels" (93). In *Godel, Escher, Bach*, Hofstadter observes that one of the fundamental differences between masters and amateurs is not the depth of their searches, but that the former are able to "not see" inferior lines of play (recall Alice being praised by the White King for seeing Nobody): "He [the master] thinks *on a different level* from the novice; his set of concepts is different. Nearly everyone is surprised to find out that in actual play, a master rarely looks ahead any further than a novice does—and moreover, a master usually examines only a handful of possible moves! The trick is that his mode of perceiving the board is like a filter: he literally *does not see bad moves* when he looks at a chess situation—no more than the amateurs see *illegal* moves when they look at a chess situation" (Hofstadter 286).

to serve the needs of their respective kings. Ultimately, they are as powerless as Alice herself, transforming into her kittens at the close of the novel.

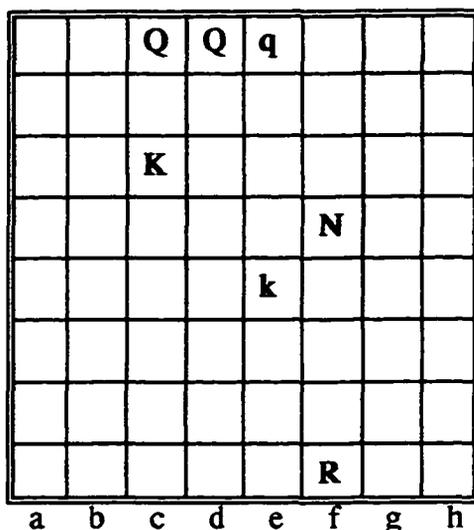


Figure 23. The Third Non-Move: Alice Becomes Queen

Carroll's prefatory chess diagram clearly indicates that Alice does not officially become a Queen the moment she reaches the Eighth Square. When she crosses the brook after leaving behind the White Knight, Alice is merely capped with a golden crown. Ironically, her act of becoming a Queen is a non-move, and what is more, it takes place at an unspecified moment in Chapter IX (i.e., there is no moment when the Red or White Queen tells her that she has passed her examinations). In showing that becoming a Queen is a non-move—something that happens to Alice when she is not aware of it—Carroll appears to be making a subtle commentary on what awaits all little girls in the process of growing up. Ideally, coming of age should be a memorable event in a young girl's life, a point at which she actively takes on new responsibilities and is afforded new opportunities, but Carroll sees through this illusion in his use of the novel's controlling chess motif. The Queen may be able to see far more than a pawn, but she also

recognizes much more clearly how she is subject to the rules of the game and how she is still contained within the sixty-four squares of the chessboard that defines her identity.

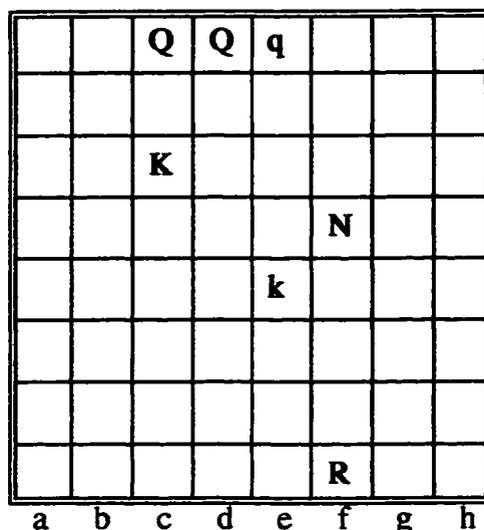


Figure 24. The Fourth Non-Move: Queens Castle

Carroll claims that "the 'castling' of the three Queens is merely a way of saying that they entered the palace" (118), but his motives behind employing such a move are worth investigating. There is no corresponding move in orthodox chess because the rules only permit the King to castle, and this in itself should suggest the point Carroll was attempting to make. Also, if we look at the board we notice that there is only one "castle" visible in the prefatory chess diagram, and the reader might reasonably speculate that the flat, two-dimensional landscape of the chessboard can be thought of as a cylinder in which the first and eighth ranks are joined. Perhaps the Rook is the "palace" in which Alice has her coronation feast or perhaps it is even Looking-Glass house itself. However, the first and eighth ranks can also be joined with a half turn of the board--the a1 square attached to h8 and the h1 square attached to a8--forming a Moebius strip, a three dimensional object having only one side. If the board were joined in this way, Alice's

progress across it would suggest that she enters the game in the same condition that she leaves it, her promotion being insufficient to change her "position" in the game.

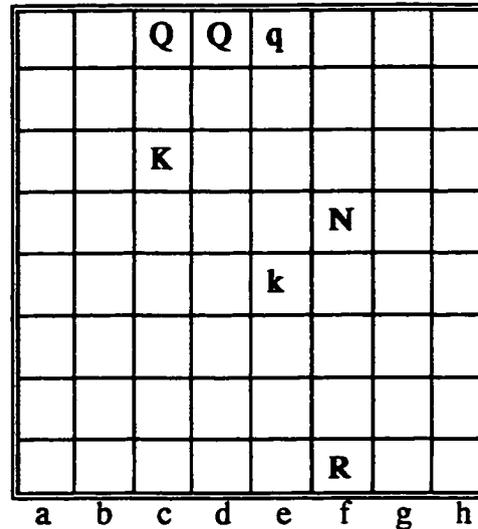


Figure 25. The Fifth Non-Move: Alice Castles

Although the Queens fall asleep and disappear into the palace as a result of their castling move, Alice is not able to gain entrance so easily. Finding herself in front of a doorway marked with her name, she is again forced to choose between unpleasant alternatives: "on each side of the arch there was a bell-handle; one was marked 'Visitors' Bell,' and the other 'Servants' Bell.' 'I'll wait till the song's over,' thought Alice, 'and then I'll ring the--the--*which* bell must I ring?' she went on, very much puzzled by the names. 'I'm not a visitor, and I'm not a servant. There *ought* to be one marked "Queen," you know" (231). Alice is unable to gain entrance to her own feast without the Frog's help, suggesting that although she acquires additional powers in undergoing promotion, she does not understand how to use them. Alice should be able to see the Red and White Queens as long as they are within her area of awareness, and yet they disappear from view without even removing to a different square.

Although Alice eventually arrives at her coronation feast—rather late, as the Red Queen informs her—she still finds that her efforts at self-directed action are consistently frustrated. Alice is famished in her Looking-Glass dream, having no more than a few exceedingly dry biscuits throughout her adventures, but her efforts to get a decent meal are thwarted by the Red Queen, who takes it upon herself to introduce Alice to the food:

‘You look a little shy: let me introduce you to that leg of mutton,’ said the Red Queen. ‘Alice—Mutton: Mutton—Alice.’ The leg of mutton got up in the dish and made a little bow to Alice; and Alice returned the bow, not knowing whether to be frightened or amused.

‘May I give you a slice?’ she said, taking up the knife and fork, and looking from one Queen to the other.

‘Certainly no,’ the Red Queen said, very decidedly: ‘it isn’t etiquette to cut any one you’ve been introduced to. Remove the joint!’ And the waiters carried it off, and brought a large plum-pudding in its place. (235)

Alice finds that very little has changed with her promotion to a Queen; indeed, she is just as helpless as she was when still a pawn, only now she is more acutely aware of it. She is subjected to a succession of highly unpleasant events: first, she is scolded by the pudding who is deeply offended at being cut; then, she is made to listen to the White Queen’s riddle, told to guess at the solution, and then not asked for her answer; in addition, she is forced to watch the Looking-Glass creatures eat “just like pigs in a trough” (236), even though she has been frequently scolded about her own lack of manners; finally, she is told that she “ought to return thanks in a neat speech” (236) but is only given a most uncomfortable amount of physical support by the Red and White Queens. However, this last hope of taking final control—of assuming the full potential of her new found powers by speaking to the Looking-Glass characters—is not to be realized because no sooner does she rise than all hell breaks loose; the coronation feast

turns into an indoor tempest and Alice looks on as the White Queen takes a swan dive into the soup tureen.

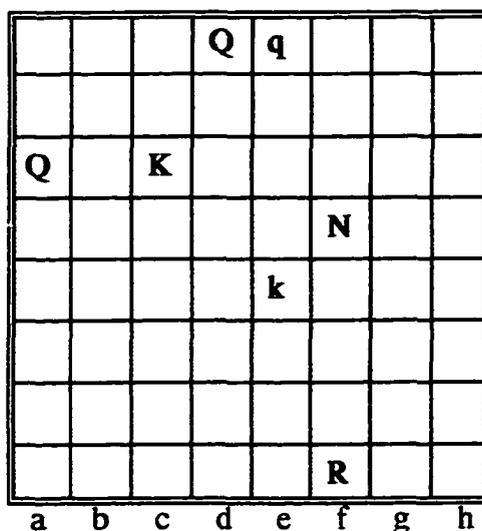


Figure 26. The Fifteenth Move: 13. Qa6

It seems that Alice's only decent response to 12. ...Qe8+ is to capture the Red Queen, but instead the White Queen plays to a6, which is illegal since the White King is left in check. Seemingly forced is 13. QAx8+ Kd3, 14. Kd5 Kd2, 15. Qa6#. Carroll's "illegal" move has given rise to critical objection because it violates not simply the principles, but indeed the very rules of orthodox chess: "There is no explanation...why the White Queen, in its final move, ignores the check by the Red Queen on the White King" (Fisher 87). However, when the White Queen disappears into the soup, it is apparently done without the knowledge of the Red Queen. The latter is present in the castle when the White Queen disappears, but there is no evidence to suggest that she notices what happens; indeed, it is reasonable to assume that the Red Queen is unaware an illegal move has been played: "At this moment [Alice] heard a hoarse laugh at her side, and turned to see what was the matter with the White Queen;

but, instead of the Queen, there was a leg of mutton sitting in the chair. 'Here I am!' cried a voice from the soup-tureen, and Alice turned again, just in time to see the Queen's broad good-natured face grinning at her for a moment over the edge of the tureen, before she disappeared into the soup" (237). Although Fisher expresses concern over the fact that the White King is left in check, he acknowledges Ivor Davies's research among the chess books listed in the Catalogue for the sale of Carroll's possessions after the author's death:

Why had White ignored the check by the Red Queen on his King? Davies reminds us that on the arrival of the Queen at King one, the Queen had explained to Alice, now her equal on the final rank, "Speak when you're spoken to!" Since on her arrival no one had spoken to her, the Red Queen could not break her own stipulation by volunteering 'check' herself. (88)

Critics have frequently scratched their heads over this move and tried to find some explanation that would satisfy them. Dickins argues that "there are several varieties of Fairy Chess where checks may be disregarded, such as the Losing Game, where no check has any validity at all" (Dickins 14). However, it is apparent that Carroll's game is not of this type since it does not end with the elimination of one set of pieces, but with the checkmate of the Red King.<sup>46</sup> As noted in the critical introduction, Taylor tries to explain how the situation can be avoided by observing that the White King could have moved to c5 when no one was looking, but of course there is no indication in the prefatory diagram

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<sup>46</sup>In Losing Chess (a.k.a. Loser Chess or Give-Away), the object is to allow your opponent to capture all of your pieces. There are no checkmates, capturing is forced, and the King is simply another piece. An example of the game is as follows: 1. e3 d6?? (now White amazingly has a forced win), 2. Qg4 Bxg4, 3. Kd1 Bxd1, 4. a3 Bxc2, 5. Ra2 Bxb1, 6. b3 Bxa2, 7. a4 Bxb3, 8. Be2 Bxa4, 9. Bd1 Bxd1, 10. Ne2 Bxe2, 11. Rf1 Bxf1, 12. f4 Bxg2, 13. h3 Bxh3, 14. f5 Bxf5, 15. e4 Bxe4, 16. d3 Bxd3, 17. Bh6 gxh6 and White wins.

that any such move takes place. Rather, Carroll allows the illegal move because the limited awareness of pieces in his game warrants such play. After all, this is his game, and though much of it is carefully ordered underneath its nonsense facade, there are moments where he challenges us to accept what is given without trying to repair or redeem it.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>For instance, although Carroll eventually replaced the *Dramatis Personae* with his 1896 Preface, there are critics who have tried to show how the non-chess-piece characters listed in this cast list can be seen as currently participating in the game. However, as I have shown with the Fawn, the Tweedle Twins, Humpty Dumpty, and others, it is a fallacy to argue that they are currently participating in the chess game without also recognizing that they are not participating in the game. For example, Chapter IV concludes by introducing us to the curious Crow, whose descent upon the unsuspecting trio of Alice and the Tweedles seems to mimic the long-range diagonal powers of the Bishop piece with which it is linked in the *Dramatis Personae*. However, this is where even the remotest of associations seems to end. We simply do not know enough about this character to consider seriously Huxley's ambitious assumption that the Crow is both the Red King's Bishop in Carroll's chess game and also somehow linked to the White Queen as well:

We can now deduce that the White Queen screams like the whistle of a steam-engine because she is a ghost on a well-trimmed board--the kind Carroll used to play chess on, in fact, when travelling by railway. But whose ghost is she?

That of the Crow, for a start, which left its footprints on the face of the Aged Aged Man: for after it comes like a cloud, along comes the White Queen, "running wildly through the wood, with both arms stretched wide, as if she were flying..." Of course, the Crow is a Bishop in the chess game, and its move has alarmed the White Queen who then removes to another square. (Huxley 164)

Huxley does not adequately explain what square the Crow is supposed to be attacking. If Tweedledum and Tweedledee belong to the Fourth Square, then does the Crow land on this square to frighten the Twins away? This seems impossible, as a Red Bishop on d4 would prevent the White Queen's eventual push to c5, a square which she soon occupies. As a bishop, the Crow would also prevent Alice's eventual checkmate of the Red King because it could interpose itself on e5 when the Red Queen is captured.

The Walrus, the Carpenter, and the Oysters are listed in the *Dramatis Personae*, but nowhere does the text confirm that the events of Tweedledee's poem occur on some

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portion of the board. Since there is no indication in Alice's remarks when she first sees the giant chessboard landscape of any large body of water approximating a "sea," the poem's mention of one in its opening line appears to place events outside the borders of the Looking-Glass chess game. In addition, the Oysters are described as "*All hopping through the frothy waves, / And scrambling to the shore*" (164), implying that they come out of the water only after being enticed by the Walrus and the Carpenter to do so. The only bodies of water to be found on the Looking-Glass landscape—apart from the one on which Alice and the metamorphosed White Queen find themselves in Chapter 5—are the brooks that horizontally divide the chessboard into ranks. If the oyster bed is located on the d5 square, then Alice and the Sheep should certainly come across the eldest oyster who remains behind when the others are led to their infamous slaughter. Furthermore, if the oyster bed is located in one of the brooks, then the Oysters still can not be part of the chess problem, because they would fail to begin the game on their designated squares.

There is an additional dilemma concerning the association of the Oysters with Red Bishop Pawns in that they would presumably find themselves affiliated with the same camp as the two characters who eventually consume them: the Walrus and the Carpenter. According to the poem, by the time the Walrus and the Carpenter are through with the Oysters, they have "eaten every one" (Carroll 166). Accepting Carroll's defunct cast list, the current (or former) Red Queen's Knight and Red Queen's Bishop have just accomplished the feat of consuming their own Bishop Pawns. This not only demonstrates the difficulty in linking the Oysters with Red Pawns, but in further associating the Walrus and the Carpenter with members of the Red camp. Indeed, there is no evidence to suggest that the Walrus and the Carpenter behave like the pieces they supposedly represent. The Walrus acts like a Walrus and not a Knight; the Carpenter acts more like a Walrus than a Carpenter, but not at all like a Bishop.

The White Knight's recitation of his "long" but "very beautiful" ballad introduces the reader to the character of the Aged Aged Man, whom Carroll's *Dramatis Personae* lists as the White King's Bishop in the chess game. Here, the reader is confronted once again with the problem of deciding whether or not a character linked to the chess game actually exists in Looking-Glass Land. The White Knight's song is given in the first person, which might perhaps indicate that he met this curious creature somewhere along his travels across the chessboard, but there is no substantive proof of this in the text. He only claims that the "tune" is of his own invention and not necessarily the words which accompany it. If the Aged Aged Man is not part of the Looking-Glass reality then it makes little sense to associate him with any piece in the chess game. Even if he is part of it—for which the text does not offer any proof—his movement and behaviour in the poem in no way confirm the validity of any association between himself and the White King's Bishop. As far as movement is concerned, the Aged Aged Man spends his time "A-sitting on a gate," unlike a Bishop, who is often found traversing the board in great stretches. With respect to this character's identity, Huxley feels that he has found an important link to the author himself: "As for the Aged Aged Man, he is not only the caricature of Wordsworth's Leech Gatherer, the incarnation of 'Resolution and

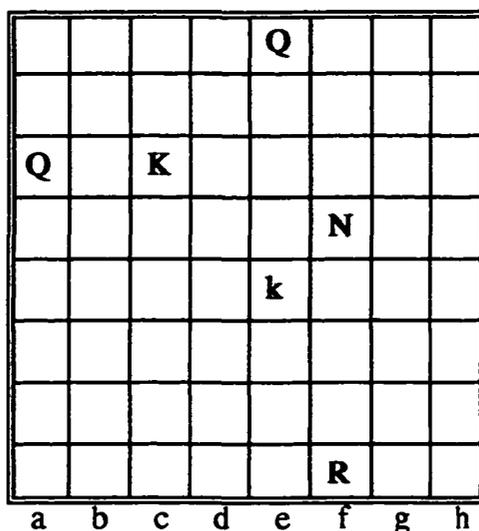


Figure 27. The Sixteenth Move: 14. Qxe8#

We now reach the final move in the solution, which sees Alice capturing the Red Queen and checkmating the Red King (14. QAx8#).<sup>48</sup> The King has no escape squares

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Independence,' but Carroll himself, for he dubbed himself by that phrase in the whimsical journal he wrote for Isa Bowman after she had visited him in Oxford" (Huxley 28). However, while the Aged Aged Man's muttering speech and general demeanour perhaps point to Dodgson's self-representation, it does not follow that this necessitates linking the character with a Bishop in the chess game.

Alice's encounter with the Frog raises the question of his participation in the chess game as one of the Red Knight's pawns. (The other Red Knight Pawn is given in the *Dramatis Personae* as Humpty Dumpty's Messenger. Like Haigha and Hatta, his profession appears to contradict the limitations imposed on his movement as a pawn in the Looking-Glass chess game.) The Frog is certainly not involved in the game at the moment, since Alice meets him when she is standing on the d8 square. Since Red pawns begin a chess game on the seventh rank, it makes little sense to assume that the Frog has somehow moved laterally and backwards from its starting position on g7 to end up on one of the squares beside Alice. Furthermore, the Frog does not appear to act like a Pawn in any respect whatsoever, serving only to scold Alice away from knocking on the door marked with her name: "'What did it ask you?' 'Nothing!' Alice said impatiently. 'I've been knocking at it!' 'Shouldn't do that--shouldn't do that--' the Frog muttered. 'Wexes it, you know.'" (232-33).

<sup>48</sup>If Alice moves to d5 the Red King is also checkmated, but in this case the White King on c6 would still be left in check.

since Alice controls the e-file, the White Rook guards the f-file, the White Knight protects against movement to d4, the White King watches over d5, and the White Queen overlooks d3. Only now do we realize the importance of the illegal move, 13. Qa6, which guards the Red King's final escape square. If Alice immediately captures the Red Queen with 13. QAx8+ then the Red King would be forced to wake up and move to d3, a move which could spell the end of the game.

Recognizing that her painstaking efforts in traversing the length of the chessboard and becoming a Queen have not brought her the autonomy for which she had been desperately searching, Alice reaches and then exceeds the limit of her senses. Carroll's description of Alice losing control is accompanied by Tenniel's illustration, which wisely faces the enraged heroine away from the viewer. There is a significant difference between this concluding episode and the close of the Wonderland dream, because instead of merely denying the existence of the assembled host of characters, Alice channels all of her unbridled rage at the Red Queen, the character who deceives her in encouraging her to take part in the Looking-Glass chess game: "I ca'n't stand this any longer!" she cried, as she jumped up and seized the tablecloth with both hands: one good pull, and plates, dishes, guests, and candles came crashing down together in a heap on the floor. 'And as for *you*,' she went on, turning fiercely upon the Red Queen, whom she considered the cause of all the mischief--but the Queen was no longer at her side" (238). Ironically, the Red Queen has shrunk to the size of a doll and is discovered "running round and round after her own shawl" (238), in much the same way as the bumbling White Queen chases after her shawl earlier in the novel. For all of her mean-spirited

authoritarianism, the Red Queen is ultimately shown to be as frail and helpless as any of the other characters.

After laying hold of the Red Queen and shaking her into a kitten, Alice awakens from her Looking-Glass dream to the security of familiar surroundings and proceeds to tell her pets precisely what roles they played in her Looking-Glass adventures. Alice reassumes her position as playful interrogator, but she is still unable to get any information from her feline subjects: "It was a very inconvenient habit of kittens (Alice had once made the remark) that, whatever you say to them, they *always* purr. 'If they would only purr for "yes," and mew for "no," or any rule of that sort, 'she had said, 'so that one could keep up a conversation! But how *can* you talk with a person if they *always* say the same thing?'" (242). In spite of what she has learned from her dream, Alice believes that she can now piece things together, but even so, she admits that she is "not sure." The novel concludes with her trying to enlist Kitty's assistance in figuring out who was responsible for dreaming her adventures in Looking-Glass land, but to no avail.

'You see, Kitty, it *must* have been either me or the Red King. He was part of my dream, of course—but then I was part of his dream, too! *Was* it the Red King, Kitty? You were his wife, my dear, so you ought to know— Oh, Kitty, *do* help to settle it! I'm sure your paw can wait!' But the provoking kitten only began on the other paw, and pretended it hadn't heard the question.

Which do you think it was? (244)

In asking us to determine whether the evidence supports one side of Alice's argument or the other, the final question forces us reflect on the whole notion of choice in the novel. Carroll is fond of riddles with no answers, perhaps because they open the door to the

kind of endless philosophical speculation he evidently found so fascinating, but also perhaps because they echo the paradoxical realities of human existence and the game of life in which Carroll, Alice, and the rest of us are made to participate on a daily basis.

## 6. Conclusion

In *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, Carroll exposes that the traditional metaphor of life as a game of chess is not incorrect so much as oversimplified. His novel acknowledges that life is infinitely more complex, with rules that are frequently misunderstood, moves that can not be explained, and outcomes in which the notions of winning and losing are decidedly blurred. Although certain rules to the Looking-Glass chess game appear to be firmly established, others seem to be made up as the game progresses, and while some moves are rather understandable, others appear to defy even the most clever interpretations. It is true that Alice gains a victory for the White pieces in the Looking-Glass chess game, but what does she win apart from a reprieve from the Red Queen's unsatisfactory treatment and a timely exit from the nightmarish goings-on of her coronation feast? If the Red Queen is symbolic of the authority figures in Alice's life, has Carroll's heroine really managed to achieve any kind of lasting victory?

By rejecting the simplicity of binary distinctions and ardently refusing to purr for "yes" and mew for "no" in its investigation of how Alice becomes entangled and ultimately stalemated in her search for self-directed action, Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* undermines restrictive critical interpretations of its chess motif in presenting the reader with an inventive new genre of fantasy fiction. His work looks

beyond Middleton's allegorical treatment of the chess motif in *A Game at Chess* and, at the same time, looks forward to Nabokov, Zweig, Beckett, and Martin Amis in their decidedly Looking-Glass literary treatments of this most royal game. Like Carroll, these writers acknowledge that chess is not a substitute for life, but an appropriate vehicle for understanding its inherent complexities as an ever-evolving game.

## CONCLUSION

Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished.

*(Pause.)*

Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap.

*(Pause.)*

I can't be punished any more.

--From Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*

I began my dissertation by noting that cursory examinations of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, and *Through the Looking-Glass* would not readily lend themselves to the discovery of profound similarities among these texts. Anne Brontë's didactic novel represents the concentrated vision of a moral realist who writes in an effort to arm readers against the dangers of vice; Thomas Hardy's work is a careful fusion of realism and ironic coincidence exploring the failure of social beings to communicate; and Lewis Carroll's children's story is a philosophical nonsense fantasy satirizing Victorian society while trying to come to terms with the ephemeral nature of human existence. However, a closer scrutiny of these novels has shown that despite their differences, they are linked through their use of an important chess metaphor, a device that symbolizes how the central female characters of these works become stalemated in their efforts to achieve autonomy. While the disparate but related paths these characters take can be likened to the predetermined progress of a pawn that travels the length of a chessboard to become a queen, what Brontë, Hardy, and Carroll all recognize is that this process is by no means a fulfilling one. On the contrary, it only serves to reveal how trapped Helen, Elfride, and Alice are within a game in which Victorian society designates them as players of only secondary importance.

Apart from its significance within a strictly Victorian context, the literature examined here looks forward to a number of modern literary texts. Twentieth-century works featuring prominent chess metaphors are indebted to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, and *Through the Looking-Glass*, though not in precisely the same way that these narratives are indebted to Middleton and Shakespeare. While Brontë, Hardy, and Carroll use chess to illuminate the problems associated with a young woman's social development, such works as Vladimir Nabokov's *The Defense* (1929),<sup>1</sup> Stefan Zweig's *The Royal Game* (1944), Samuel Becket's *Endgame* (1958), and Martin Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984) deal exclusively with the progress and development of male characters. In these works, the depiction of individuals finding themselves trapped by their social environments is combined with an analysis of the inner chess games that plague each of the central protagonists. However, although the great chess works of the twentieth century tend to be psychologically complex examinations of male characters, the manner in which they use chess as a controlling metaphor owes itself to the collective achievement of the three novels we have examined here.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Originally published as *Zashchita Luzhina* in 1929, the novel did not appear in an English-language edition until 1964. As Nabokov relates in his foreword to *The Defense*, the novel would have been published in English far sooner, but for the unfortunate predilections of its potential publisher: "True, there was a promising flurry in the late thirties when an American publisher showed interest in it, but he turned out to belong to the type of publisher who dreams of becoming a male muse to his author, and our brief conjunction ended abruptly upon his suggesting I replace chess by music and make Luzhin a demented violinist" (Nabokov 8).

<sup>2</sup>A contemporary novel that deals exclusively with the development of a female chess player is Walter Tevis's *The Queen's Gambit*. It tells the story of Beth Harmon, a young orphan who learns to play chess from the janitor at the Methuen Home where she has lived ever since her mother died. Beth is recognized as a prodigy and overcomes

Like Brontë, Hardy, and Carroll before him, Nabokov uses chess to explore how a character can become trapped in his efforts to take control of the games in which he finds himself.<sup>3</sup> Aleksandr Ivanovich Luzhin, the brooding Russian grandmaster of *The Defense*, is both the originator of complex and elegant strategies, and a desperate plaything at the mercy of the relentless psychological combination that ultimately checkmates him. Luzhin becomes trapped within his struggle to break free of this combination because in his efforts to construct a defence, he fails to recognize the extent to which the relentlessly unfolding patterns of his life are a product of his own disturbed psychology. He believes that by introducing randomness into his actions and by making unusual moves he can somehow subvert the fatal combination and divine its horrifying purpose, but the reader can see that Nabokov's morose chess player carefully constructs

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addictions to tranquilizers and alcohol on her way to beating the best male chess players in the world. Interestingly enough, although she experiences a significant degree of sexism in the world of chess, the game itself is a haven for her, a world in which she has total control of her own destiny. The reader learns this as early as the first time that Beth displays her talent by giving a simultaneous exhibition at the local high school: "Abruptly she saw herself as a small unimportant person--a plain, brown-haired orphan girl in dull institutional clothes. She was half the size of these easy, insolent students with their loud voices and bright sweaters. She felt powerless and silly. But then she looked at the boards again, with the pieces set in the familiar pattern, and the unpleasant feelings lessened. She might be out of place in this public high school, but she was not out of place with those twelve chessboards" (Tevis 28). In this way, the novel's handling of the chess motif represents a significant departure from the nineteenth-century texts we have examined, because for Beth the game is a source of liberation.

<sup>3</sup>Helen defeats Hargrave in his attempt to seduce her at chess, only to discover that she has been beaten by Lady Lowborough; Elfride easily defeats Stephen and is subsequently able to sacrifice him for Knight, but she is never able to assert control in the second relationship; Alice travels the chessboard and becomes a queen, only to realize that she has no more power than before; similarly, Luzhin uses chess to escape from a world that he does not fully understand, but discovers that the world itself has become a chess game that threatens to checkmate him.

these patterns even as he tries frantically to unravel them.

Chess serves as the controlling force in Luzhin's life and the controlling metaphor in Nabokov's novel, from the author's use of chess imagery to his juxtaposition of Luzhin's chess play with the grandmaster's nervous breakdown and subsequent mental collapse.<sup>4</sup> Like Hardy, Nabokov meticulously demonstrates throughout the opening stages of the novel how the fatal patterns of Luzhin's undoing are ingrained in him from childhood. Indeed, his protagonist's game of dealing with reality by reducing it to an ordered chess-like system is in part a product of an unusual domestic situation. Nabokov also shows that although Luzhin's strategy for idealizing repetition is destined to fail

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<sup>4</sup>Nabokov's prefatory remarks for the English edition of *Zashchita Luzhina* emphasize the extent to which chess serves as a controlling metaphor in his novel. Indeed, he articulates the importance of the chess metaphor by alluding to a famous nineteenth-century chess encounter: "Rereading the novel today, replaying the moves of its plot, I feel rather like Anderssen fondly recalling the sacrifice of both Rooks to the unfortunate and noble Kieseritsky—who is doomed to accept it over and over again through an infinity of textbooks, with a question mark for monument. My story was difficult to compose, but I greatly enjoyed taking advantage of this or that image and scene to introduce a fatal pattern into Luzhin's life and to endow the description of a garden, a journey, a sequence of humdrum events, with the semblance of a game of skill, and, especially in the final chapters, with that of a regular chess attack demolishing the innermost elements of the poor fellow's sanity" (8). The Anderssen--Kieseritsky game to which Nabokov refers was played during the London tournament of 1851, although it was a casual game and not part of the competition. It is widely regarded as one of the greatest chess games ever to be played and has received the distinction of being coined "The Immortal Game." Anderssen plays the King's Bishop Gambit, a variation of the King's Gambit in which White plays the King's Bishop to c4 on move three instead of immediately bringing out the Knight, thus allowing Black to play 3. Qh4+. Kieseritsky adopts this latter strategy, but is forced to spend an inordinate amount of time finding squares for his Queen, so that in the end he succumbs to a brilliant mating attack prefaced by a double-Rook sacrifice. The game proceeded as follows: 1. e4 e5, 2. f4 exf4, 3. Bc4 Qh4+, 4. Kf1 b5, 5. Bxb5 Nf6, 6. Nf3 Qh6, 7. d3 Nh5, 8. Nh4 Qg5, 9. Nf5 c6, 10. g4 Nf6, 11. Rg1 cxb5, 12. h4 Qg6, 13. h5 Qg5, 14. Qg3 Ng8, 15. Bxf4 Qf6, 16. Nc3 Bc5, 17. Nd5 Qxb2, 18. Bd6 Qxa1+, 19. Ke2 Bxg1 20. e5 Na6, 21. Nxg7+ Kd8, 22. Qf6+ Nxf6 23. Be7#.

because it breaks down when confronted by certain unavoidable incongruities, this only makes him cling more desperately to the pattern, until the pattern reveals itself as the demon to be exorcised. Ultimately, Luzhin sees what characters like Carroll's Alice and Brontë's Helen are fortunate enough to learn at far less cost: that adhering to the rules of play does not provide players with the means of escaping the game.

The anxiety that Helen feels after losing to Walter at chess, and both the uncontrollable despondency and feverish delirium that Elfride experiences when she is bested by Knight serve as Victorian precursors to the "chess poisoning" that threatens Dr. B's sanity in Stefan Zweig's *The Royal Game*. Dr. B. is not, however, driven to psychological distraction by winning or losing, but by becoming lost both in the complex combinations that overwhelm him and in the attempt to split himself into two distinct personalities which he identifies as the Black and White Egos.<sup>5</sup> Like Grandmaster Luzhin, whose chess play leads him to believe that his life has become a haunting chess game playing an unavoidable combination against him, Dr. B. is unable to stay in touch with reality once the game takes control:

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<sup>5</sup>This splitting of identities is also featured in Stanley Ellin's short story "Fool's Mate", in which George Huneker's efforts to play chess against himself result in his manifesting a schizoid personality disorder: "He had been on the verge of a great discovery, he knew that; but what exactly had it been? Was it that changing places physically had allowed him to project himself into the forms of the two players, each separate and distinct from the other?...He had left the position on the board perilously exposed through a bit of carelessness, and then in an effort to recover himself had moved the king's bishop in a neat defensive gesture that could cost white dear. When he looked up to study White's possible answer he saw White sitting there in the chair across the table, his fingertips gently touching each other, an ironic smile on his lips. 'Good,' said White pleasantly. 'Surprisingly good for you, George'" (Ellin 26-27). Overcome, like Stevenson's Henry Jekyll, by this evil persona, George murders his wife.

The warder had heard shrieks from my cell and thought, at first, that I was disputing with somebody who had broken in. But no sooner had he shown himself at the door than I made for him, shouted wildly something that sounded like 'Aren't you ever going to move, you rascal, you coward?' grasped at his windpipe, and finally attacked him so ferociously that he had to call for help. Then when they were dragging me, in my mad rage, for medical examination, I had suddenly broken loose and thrust myself against the window in the corridor, thereby lacerating my hand. (Zweig 347)

If Helen and Elfride represent the fundamental difference between someone who can limit herself to a single defeat, and someone who cannot be satisfied with anything short of a win, then Dr. B. represents the extreme case in which neither victory nor defeat provides for a satisfying climax to the game.<sup>6</sup>

Zweig's short story has certain thematic parallels to the nineteenth-century novels discussed here because at its core it is a study in human isolation.<sup>7</sup> Mirko Czentovic and Dr. B. sharply contrast one another through their radically different approaches to playing chess, but both share the similar position of having endured periods of acute segregation. Czentovic is orphaned as a child, grows up misunderstood, and eventually shuns (and is shunned by) the community of chess players to whom he belongs, while Dr. B. is imprisoned for several months by the Nazis and forced to endure the psychological torture

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<sup>6</sup>Elfride's inability to stop herself is understandable because she keeps losing to Knight, but Dr. B. challenges Czentovic to another game moments after defeating him.

<sup>7</sup>The heroines we have examined all endure acute forms of isolation. Helen is abandoned by Huntington at Grassdale for months at a time, and when in the wake of losing to Hargrave at chess she discovers her husband's infidelity, she feels herself deserted by everyone but God. Elfride, too, although complicit with Stephen in their pact to elope and be married, finds herself utterly isolated during her relationship with Knight because of the "dreadful" secret she carries with her. Finally, Alice is the isolated pawn who, although surrounded by a host of different Looking-Glass characters, finds herself feeling as though she is all alone.

of being deprived of any human contact.<sup>8</sup> Each man appears to find an escape from his isolation through chess, but in both cases the game only serves to engender further isolation. Czentovic's sacrifice of cultural accomplishments for the sake of his chess talent makes him unwilling to come into contact with other human beings unless monetary remuneration is involved, and even this comes with the stipulation that the meeting must take place over the chess board. Dr. B. uses chess to replace the emptiness of his psychological prison, only to discover that once the void has been filled he can not prevent his mental chess games from spilling over and drowning him.<sup>9</sup>

In Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, the author takes the animated chess games of Middleton's *A Game at Chess* and Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* and removes the physical structure of the game, leaving his characters to exist in an inescapable, tedious,

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<sup>8</sup>Another twentieth-century novel that draws a parallel between chess and the horrors of psychological torture is George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Once Winston Smith has been broken by O'Brien and the Ministry of Love, he finds himself spending his remaining days in the local watering hole drinking victory gin and analyzing chess problems published in the newspaper. On one such occasion he makes a rather profound discovery about the relationship between chess and the state: "He examined the chess problem and set out the pieces. It was a tricky ending, involving a couple of knights. 'White to play and mate in two moves.' Winston looked up at the portrait of Big Brother. White always mates, he thought with a sort of cloudy mysticism. Always, without exception, it is so arranged. In no chess problem since the beginning of the world has black ever won. Did it not symbolize the eternal, unvarying triumph of Good over Evil? The huge face gazed back at him, full of calm power. White always mates" (Orwell 302).

<sup>9</sup>When Dr. B. wakes up to find himself in the hospital, the doctor thinks he must be a chemist or mathematician because he has been murmuring "such unusual formulas, c3, c4" (Zweig 346). The reader will recall from *A Pair of Blue Eyes* that when Knight defeats Elfride at chess for the final time, Mrs. Swancourt discovers her stepdaughter in a similar state: "Elfride was lying full-dressed upon the bed, her face hot and red, her arms thrown abroad. At intervals of a minute she tossed restlessly from side to side, and indistinctly moaned words used in the game of chess" (Hardy 168).

endgame-like existence. Hamm and Clov behave as though they are players involved in a monotonous game, but they are not chess-piece characters, nor do they traverse a chequered board.<sup>10</sup> If *A Pair of Blue Eyes* is loosely structured on the Muzio gambit and *Through the Looking-Glass* is plotted according to the solution to an unorthodox chess problem, then Beckett's play is modelled on the final stages of a chess game in which the King (Hamm) and his pawns (Clov, Nagg, and Nell) are slowly, deliberately, and predictably shifted back and forth without any discernible outcome in view.

Beckett's use of the chess metaphor is ideal given his predilection for the absurd, because he can end the game by refusing to end it, by leaving it in a position that is not any closer to being resolved than at the commencement of the endgame.<sup>11</sup> Like Helen, Elfride, and Alice, Beckett's characters are trapped within the game both as players and as pieces, but Beckett carries the idea to its absurd extreme by denying his characters any means of respite, let alone escape.<sup>12</sup> Here there can be neither Brontë's happy ending, nor Hardy's tragic ending, nor Carroll's sobering ending, because with Beckett, of

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<sup>10</sup>For an example of a short story that reenacts an actual game using chess-piece characters, see Poul Anderssen's "The Immortal Game" (1954).

<sup>11</sup>Clov appears to be making his exit at the close of the play, but as he does not leave before the curtain falls, the audience can not be sure that he actually abandons Hamm. As Bell Gale Chevigny remarks in her introduction to *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Beckett* (1969), "Clov's final hovering on the threshold [is] more likely to relive the day-cycle than to move into another phase" (4). Also, Hamm ends the play just as he begins it, by replacing the bloody handkerchief and lowering his arms to his sides to once again become motionless.

<sup>12</sup>As Clov reiterates throughout the play, outside the walls of their dwelling is what can only be defined as "Zero." Although Clov indicates near the close of the play that he has seen a young boy—"a potential procreator" (78)—it remains unclear whether or not this is simply a product of his own invention.

course, there is no ending. In addition, *Endgame* sees an absurd continuation of the futile games that trouble our nineteenth-century heroines. Like Alice, who is forced to walk in one direction in order to travel in the other or distribute Looking-Glass plum cake before eating it, the characters of Beckett's endgame can only manage to play the kinds of games that accomplish nothing. The agony of these futile games is expressed in Clov's remark "If I could kill him I'd die happy" (27), but Clov is no more capable of killing Hamm than deserting him. If Hamm is indeed the King then he can be checkmated or stalemated, but not captured or killed as Clov would have it.

In Martin Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note*, chess is once again used as a metaphor for the relentless and frustrating games that plague the central character. However, unlike the nineteenth-century heroines we have examined, Amis's protagonist bears primary responsibility for the outcome of these games. Near the close of the novel, John Self (a self-proclaimed addict of the twentieth century) confidently engages in a game of chess against the author, Martin Amis, only to lose when he allows his pieces to be placed in a position known as a *trebuchet*.<sup>13</sup> The game is not simply the kind of incidental chess match found in either *Women Beware Women* or *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, but rather one which reflects and validates Self's perception of his life as a sort of cruel joke:

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<sup>13</sup>The *trebuchet* is a *zugzwang* position involving King and pawn vs. King and pawn. In the novel, the opposing pawns occupy the Queen's Bishop (or c-) file, while the Kings are placed adjacent to (but on opposite sides of) the enemy pawn. A sample configuration might be: White: King on b5, pawn on c4; Black: King on d4, pawn on c5. In this position, whoever has the move loses because the King is forced to move away from his pawn, allowing it to be captured and the enemy pawn to queen.

"Zugzwang," he said.

"What the fuck does that mean?"

"Literally, *forced to move*. It means that whoever has to move has to lose. If it were my turn now, you'd win. But it's yours. And you lose."

"Pure fucking jam, in other words. Dumb luck."

"Hardly," he said. "The opposition itself is a kind of zugzwang in which the relationship between the kings assumes a regular pattern. There is such a thing, though, as the heterodox opposition. In composed positions you could call them conjugated square studies. You see, the--"

I clamped my hands over my ears. Martin talked on, shadowy, waxy, flicker-faced. I don't know if this strange new voice of mine carried anywhere when I said, "*I'm the joke. I'm it! It was you. It was you.*" (Amis 379)

Throughout the novel, Self constantly finds himself in positions of *zugzwang*, but often his dilemmas are motivated by his own destructive addictions.<sup>14</sup> He is neither able to recognize Amis's clever combination in the chess game nor Fielding Goodney's motiveless strategy behind the con-game because he only ever prepares a short term strategy for dealing with the situations that confront him.<sup>15</sup> For example, Self excels at

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"For instance, he finds himself in a dilemma when he is unable to decide if should tell Martina about her husband's infidelity with Selina, but only because he does not know whether this will help or hurt his chances of sleeping with her: "She knew nothing: Ossie was simply *in London*, as he often was. And now I had this fat red trump up my sleeve--knowledge. How to use it? Should I use it all?...In my first ponderings on the matter I had arrived at the following strategy: I would wait until Martina showed signs of depression or listlessness--and then blackjack her with the news. And after that, you know, she'd melt into my arms, all dreamy and tearful. Seeing her again, though, in person, the mouth, the human eyes, I soon questioned the bankability of my plan. Hey, you, you chicks out there. How should I play it? Help me. Should I level with her, man to woman? Or accompany the information with a pally little pass? Or should I just shut up? Well, I don't see the economics in that, quite frankly. I feel I'm owed some kind of kickback on the deal...It seems I have a moral dilemma on my hands, God damn it. Moral dilemmas--what do you *do* about them?" (286).

<sup>15</sup>As he plays chess against Amis, Self's efforts to formulate an overall strategic plan are consistently frustrated by his own shortsightedness: "I was searching for blueprints, for forms and patterns, when he launched a tedious series of pokes and prods

physical violence, but his opponents (i.e. Goodney, Amis, Selina, and even his pseudo-father Barry) overmatch him whenever the game involves formulating a plan. He knows how to satisfy his short term objectives quickly and efficiently,<sup>16</sup> but he consistently misses life's little subtexts.<sup>17</sup>

John Self may very well be the definitive antithesis of the female characters we have been discussing, playing a postmodern Caliban to their Victorian Mirandas. However, he manages to win the reader's sympathy because at the very centre of his character is an individual who lacks the ability to extricate himself from the games in which he becomes entangled. Like Winston Smith, the unfortunate hero of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Self's indulgences irrevocably land him in Room 101 (at the Ashberry, of course, not the Ministry of Love). Ultimately, Self's definition of life as a relentless but ruined chess game is the perfect postmodern extension of what Hardy, Carroll, Nabokov, Zweig, and Beckett suggest in their respective works:

Each life is a game of chess that went to hell on the seventh move, and now the flukey play is cramped and slow, a dream of constraint and cross-

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at my extended pawns. This was no sweat to counter in itself, but I had to wheel my guns away from his sparse kingside, back from the centre too, where Martin was beginning to establish a couple of minor pieces--that knight again, a useful black-square bishop...Oh Christ, I thought, it's turning into one of those games. Within the space of three moves I had been nudged into a position of intricate inertia, my pieces cramped and clustered, misled, cross-purposed. It would take at least two tempos to find any freedom and I never seemed to have a beat to spare. My every touch was a bit of fine-tuning, delicate repair-work in shrinking space" (374).

<sup>16</sup>Self constantly indulges in those vices that offer instantaneous gratification (alcohol, drugs, fast food, slot machines, video games), but at the expense of long term suffering (the tinnitus attacks, bowel disorders, and terminal toothaches).

<sup>17</sup>This, of course, is literalized when Self reads Orwell's *Animal Farm* and does not realize that the novel is an allegory of the Russian Revolution.

purpose, with each move forced, all pieces pinned and skewered and zugzwanged...But here and there we see these figures who appear to run on the true lines, and they are terrible examples. They're rich usually. (119).

Although twentieth-century literary texts featuring a prominent chess motif focus almost exclusively on the psychological development of male characters, their indebtedness to the Victorian works I have examined should not be underestimated. In recognizing that the traditional expression "life is a chess game" should only function as a starting point for a deeper investigation of this complex metaphor, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, and *Through the Looking-Glass* paved the way for the literary chess works of the twentieth-century. Indeed, the growing complexity with which Brontë, Hardy, and finally Carroll explored the metaphorical implications of chess in their narratives served to underscore the rich potential of chess as a literary motif.

## APPENDIX 1

## Algebraic Notation

Although there have been numerous systems employed to record chess moves, algebraic notation is the method most frequently found in contemporary manuals on the game.<sup>1</sup> Players who record algebraically begin by assuming that the vertical files of the chess board are designated "a" through "h" and that the horizontal ranks are numbered "1" through "8." The board is therefore viewed as an alpha-numeric grid:

Black

a8	b8	c8	d8	e8	f8	g8	h8
a7	b7	c7	d7	e7	f7	g7	h7
a6	b6	c6	d6	e6	f6	g6	h6
a5	b5	c5	d5	e5	f5	g5	h5
a4	b4	c4	d4	e4	f4	g4	h4
a3	b3	c3	d3	e3	f3	g3	h3
a2	b2	c2	d2	e2	f2	g2	h2
a1	b1	c1	d1	e1	f1	g1	h1

White

Figure 28. Algebraic Coordinates

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<sup>1</sup>Chess games can also be recorded using co-ordinate, descriptive, or Forsythe notation. Co-ordinate notation assumes the same alpha-numeric grid but moves are indicated by listing the squares where the move begins and ends. Descriptive notation divides the board into the king's and queen's fields and each player considers his own first rank to be *the* first rank for the purposes of recording. Forsythe notation is typically used to record positions and consists of a string of letters and numbers to indicate whether or not squares are occupied. Below is an example of how the different notations work:

<u>Algebraic</u>	<u>Co-ordinate</u>	<u>Descriptive</u>	<u>Forsythe</u>
1. e4	1. e2-e4	1. P-K4	mbqkbnrpppppppp20P11PPPP1PPPRNBKQBNR

For each move in the game players record the first letter of the piece that has been moved (K=King, Q=Queen, R=Rook, B=Bishop, N=Knight), the square to which the piece has been moved, whether a capture has been involved ("x"), whether a check has been made ("+"), and whether some type of mate or other game-ending result has been achieved ("#" for checkmate, "½-½" for a draw or stalemate, "1-0" for Black resigns, and "0-1" for White resigns).<sup>2</sup> For instance, if a Black Knight on c3 captures a White Bishop on d5 with check, the players record this as "Nxd5+". If a White pawn is moved from e4 to e5 and Black subsequently resigns, the players write "e5, 1-0" (pawns are given no letter prefix). The only exceptions are for short and long castling, which are respectively recorded as O-O and O-O-O. The following symbols are commonly used for annotation:

??	- Blunder
?	- Bad move
?!	- Dubious move
!?	- Interesting move
!	- Good move
!!	- Brilliancy
+	- White/Black has a winning advantage
+/--	- White is better
--/+	- Black is better
+/=	- White is slightly better
=/+	- Black is slightly better
=	- The position is equal
∞	- The position is unclear
0-1	- White resigns
1-0	- Black resigns

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<sup>2</sup>If two identical pieces can both move to the same square (i.e. White Knights on g1 and d2 guarding the vacant f3) then the player indicates which piece is being moved by including the file of its original square (i.e. Ngf3 or Ndf3). If the pieces occupy the same file (i.e. Black Rooks on h2 and h8 guarding the vacant h5) then the player includes the rank number of the piece's original square (i.e. R2h5 or R8h5).

## APPENDIX 2

### Chess Terminology

- BACK RANK MATE** A lateral mate given on a player's first rank either by an enemy Queen or a Rook. Typically, the King is prevented from escaping by his own wall of pawns meant to protect him.
- BAD BISHOP** A Bishop whose mobility is hampered by finding itself on the same colour of a fixed chain of friendly pawns. It is usually better for the Bishop to be outside rather than inside such a chain. In Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, Christopher Swancourt is in many ways an example of the symbolic bad bishop, incessantly colliding with those whom he considers his social inferiors and thus hampered by his own pawns.
- BATTERY** Two or more friendly pieces occupying a similar rank, file, or diagonal whose combined force threatens the enemy camp.
- BLIND MATE** Described by Arthur Saul in *The Famous Game of Chesse-Playe*, it is a checkmate given without the checking player recognizing that the position is a mate. The player giving the blind mate wins the game despite not recognizing that the position is checkmate. However, the blind mates played by Livia against Leantio's Mother in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* symbolically reinforce the latter's blindness to the events taking place offstage.
- BLOCKADE** Preventing the advance of an enemy pawn by occupying the square in front of it with a piece. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Humpty Dumpty seems to perform such a function in slowing Alice's progress towards the queening square although he is apparently not involved in the chess game.
- CASTLING** A move allowed once during the course of the game in which the player moves his or her King two squares laterally and places the Rook on the square over which the King has passed. The player can castle either kingside (O-O) or queenside (O-O-O) providing that neither the King nor the Rook in question has moved. The "castling" of Alice and the Red and White Queens in *Looking-Glass* is not such a move and is merely a way for Carroll to explain how they enter the palace. Also, Elfride Swancourt appears to castle (metaphorically speaking) with Lord Luxellian when she marries him in the closing stages of Hardy's novel.

- CENTRE** The four central squares of the chessboard (d5, e5, e4, and d4) which players attempt to occupy and control. The extended centre includes the ring of squares enclosing the centre: c6, d6, e6, f6, f5, f4, f3, e3, d3, c3, c4, and c5.
- CHEAPO** A move played with a simple tactical threat which might nonetheless be easily overlooked. The cheapo is often unsound and is usually made by a player who has an inferior position.
- CHECK** A position in which the King is attacked by an opposing piece.
- CHECKMATE** A position in which the King is in check and can not move out of check. If the player can neither move the King, interpose a piece to block the check, or capture the checking piece, he or she is said to be checkmated and loses the game. Checkmates end all of the games in Brontë, Hardy, and Carroll.
- CORRAL** Cornering an enemy piece (usually a Knight) with one's own pieces for the purpose of winning it. In *Looking-Glass*, when the White Queen moves to f8 after leaving the shop and comes to rest beside the Red Knight, she effectively corrals him by cutting off all of his escape squares.
- DISCOVERED CHECK** A move that allows a check to be given by a stationary friendly piece. Such checks are dangerous because the piece which has moved can attack an important enemy piece while forcing the opponent's King to deal with the check given by the other piece. If a checkmate rather than a check has resulted, the move is termed a discovered mate. Such a move ends the chess game in Middleton's *A Game at Chess*, while in *Blue Eyes*, Elfride and Stephen attempt to play an Undiscovered Mate.
- DOUBLE CHECK** A check given by a piece whose move has also allowed a simultaneous check by another friendly piece. The only way to escape a double check is by moving the defending king since interposition or capture is not possible.
- DOUBLED PAWN** A pawn that occupies the same file as another friendly pawn. Since these pawns can neither defend one another nor form a phalanx they are often considered weak.
- EN PASSANT** Meaning "In passing," the term denotes the capture of a pawn which has moved two spaces for its first move and now stands

directly beside an enemy pawn. Because in moving two spaces, the pawn has deprived its enemy of capturing it, *En Passant* states that the pawn may be captured by removing it from the board and placing the capturing pawn on the square that it would normally occupy after capture. Alice appears to fall victim to a symbolic *en passant* by the passengers aboard the Looking-Glass train as she travels to the Fourth Square.

- the EXCHANGE      A sacrifice or loss of a Rook for either a Knight or Bishop. The player who gets the Rook is said to have "won the exchange" and the player who gets the Knight or Bishop is said either to have "sacrificed or lost the exchange." Elfride appears to win the exchange when she loses Knight but "castles" with Luxellian (the Rook); however, her position has deteriorated to the point that winning the exchange can not remedy things.
- FAIRY CHESS      Variations of chess involving fundamental changes to either the board, pieces, rules, or objectives of orthodox chess.
- FERS*              The medieval counterpart to the queen, the *fers* could move only one diagonal square at a time, making it one of the weakest pieces on the board.
- FIANCHETTO      Developing a bishop to either b2, g2, b8, or g8 by first moving the appropriate Knight pawn. A fianchettoed bishop exerts control over the centre without directly occupying it.
- FILE                A vertical line of the chessboard.
- FORK                A term—often applied to the Knight, though not exclusively—that denotes the attack of more than one enemy piece by a single unit. Henry Knight could be said to "fork" Stephen and Elfride.
- GAMBIT            A move, typically in the opening, in which a player offers to sacrifice material for tactical or positional considerations. Elfride plays the Muzio Gambit against Stephen in which she sacrifices a pawn and then a Knight for the sake of development.
- GOOD KNIGHT      A Knight that is mobile and able to occupy a square in the enemy camp with the support of an advanced pawn. Hardy's Knight is not so much a Good Knight as an oblivious one.
- GRANDMASTER    The highest ranking awarded to a player (apart from the title of World Champion), it denotes a player whose FIDE rating is 2500

or greater and who has achieved significant results in international tournament play.

**HANGING  
PAWNS**

A pair of pawns (typically the c and d pawns) which do not have pawns to either side of them (no b or e pawns). The pair is usually weak because when one of the pawns is forced to advance, the other can often be blockaded and won, leaving the advanced pawn isolated. Elfride and Stephen can be seen as Hanging Pawns during the course of their aborted elopement.

**HYPERMODERN**

A school of chess thought championed by Richard Reti in the early part of the twentieth century which advocated control of the centre by operation on the flanks rather than through direct occupation.

***ISOLANI***

This term refers to an isolated d-pawn, which although seemingly weak can nevertheless provide a player with certain tactical possibilities that other isolated pawns do not afford. Alice is an *isolani*, and she manages to promote and win the game for the White pieces.

**ISOLATED PAWN**

A pawn that does not have a friendly pawn on either file adjacent to it. Because it must be supported and/or defended by pieces, an isolated pawn is often a source of weakness. Alice is an isolated pawn because there are no friendly pawns to support her, but the fact that she is a passed pawn more than compensates for this.

***J'ADOUBE***

Meaning "I adjust," the term is used by chess players who wish to adjust the position of a piece on its square without having to move it. The phrase must be spoken before the piece is touched.

**MASTER**

A player rated over 2200.

**MINORITY  
ATTACK**

An attack by one or more pawns on the base of a larger enemy pawn chain.

**NOTATION**

A system of recording the moves of a chess game, of which Algebraic, Descriptive, Co-ordinate, and Forsythe are the most common.

**PASSED PAWN**

A pawn that does not have an enemy pawn on either file adjacent to it. Such a pawn is dangerous for the opponent because pieces must be used to prevent it from promoting. As was previously mentioned, Alice is just such a pawn.

- PIN** The restriction of an enemy unit's mobility by placing one's piece in such a way that if the enemy unit does move, a piece of greater value will be exposed to capture. In *Looking-Glass*, the White Queen is "pinned" and "pins" Alice against the sleeping Red King.
- PROMOTION** A move in which a pawn which has reached the eighth rank of the board is exchanged for either a Knight, Bishop, Rook, or Queen. If the pawn is exchanged for anything but a Queen it is said to be "underpromoted." Alice is promoted to a Queen when she reaches the Eighth Square of her *Looking-Glass* dream journey.
- RANK** A horizontal line of the chessboard.
- RESIGNATION** The act of surrendering a game without waiting to be checkmated.
- ROMANTIC** The style of chess most often associated with the nineteenth century, in which daring sacrificial attacks were sought rather than small positional advantages. Elfride's Muzio Gambit is a romantic opening involving spectacular sacrifices, and Hargrave appears to be playing in the romantic tradition by giving up a significant number of pieces to Helen in order to effect checkmate.
- SACRIFICE** Giving up material for some other type of advantage.
- SKEWER** The opposite of a pin, a skewer is an attack on a highly-valued enemy piece whose resulting movement exposes a piece of lesser value to capture. Hardy's Black Queen, Mrs. Jethway, effects a kind of skewer by going through Knight via the incriminating letter in order to get at Elfride.
- STALEMATE** A position in which the King is not in check but can not avoid moving into check. The player is said to be stalemated and the game is a draw.
- STAUNTON SET** Named for its inventor, Howard Staunton, it is the standard set of chess pieces used by competitive players.
- TEMPO** A unit of time measured by piece development. If a player is unwillingly forced to move a piece because it has subjected itself to attack than he or she is said to have lost a tempo.
- TOUCH-MOVE** A rule in chess which stipulates that when a player touches a piece it must be moved, and that when he or she releases the piece the move must stand. Elfride finds herself being held to this rule

when she begins to lose to Knight.

**ZUGZWANG**

The term denotes a position in which the player having the move loses because he or she is forced to yield a significant tactical or positional concession. In *Money: A Suicide Note*, John Self finds himself in *zugzwang* (the *trebuchet* position) when he plays chess against Martin Amis near the close of the novel.

**ZWISCHENZUG**

Meaning "In-between move," the term usually denotes a move that can be made instead of an obvious recapture because the opponent must deal with the in-between move first.

## APPENDIX 3

### Chess and its Complexities

#### 1. The Geography of the Chessboard

‘I declare it’s marked out just like a huge chess-board!’ Alice said at last. ‘There ought to be some men moving about somewhere—and so there are!’ she added in a tone of delight, and her heart began to beat quick with excitement as she went on. ‘It’s a great huge game of chess that’s being played—all over the world—if this *is* the world at all.’

—From Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*

At first sight, the geography of the chessboard appears ridiculously uncomplicated. The board is a three-dimensional object, but the third dimension is relevant only in that it allows the board a physical existence in representing a two-dimensional playing field. Similarly, a single, two-dimensional square on the board is a one-dimensional node for game purposes, because the square assumes a binary status of being either occupied or unoccupied, movement within the square being immaterial. The board is composed of sixty-four squares arranged in eight rows and eight columns, and although it originally appeared as a colourless grid, its black and white chequered pattern was subsequently implemented to facilitate the player’s perception of the individual squares (Lasker 2).<sup>1</sup>

In his *Manual of Chess* (1947), Emmanuel Lasker argues that students of the game should not simply familiarize themselves with the general shape and pattern of the chessboard, but be able to recognize any given square at a moment’s notice: “The student

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<sup>1</sup>Although the colouring of these squares may vary and is, in fact, only significant insofar as it provides contrast, the proper orientation of the board with the principal white (or light-coloured) diagonal running from the top left to the bottom right from the players’ perspective is required before the pieces can be placed.

should endeavour to acquire the habit of designating the squares and of visualising their position. There are many Chess-players who fail merely from their incapacity to master this geometrical task, not suspecting its value" (4). Indeed, the great irony of the chess board is that while all of the alternately coloured squares appear the same, they are by no means equal in terms of their strategic importance in the game. This might not initially appear to be the case to the casual observer, for taking the rook as an example, a diagram of its movement availability from different locations on the board does not show anything that would suggest the centre to be more important than the periphery:

14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14

Figure 29. Available Movement for the Rook

The Rook controls a total of fourteen squares from any location on the board, assuming of course that there are no intervening pieces to block its path.<sup>2</sup> That a Rook can only move in two different directions when situated in the corner is offset by the fact that it can move seven squares in either of these two directions. Furthermore, the Rook can

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<sup>2</sup>The Rook in Carroll's Looking-Glass chess game has only seven squares of available movement because the White Queen and White Knight respectively block its control of squares on the first rank and the f-file.

reach any square that it does not immediately control in two moves, irrespective of its position on the board. However, the Rook's ability to exert the same measure of control from any location makes it an anomaly among the pieces, as becomes evident when we observe the limitations imposed on other pieces by the chess board's geography:

2	3	4	4	4	4	3	2
3	4	6	6	6	6	4	3
4	6	8	8	8	8	6	4
4	6	8	8	8	8	6	4
4	6	8	8	8	8	6	4
4	6	8	8	8	8	6	4
3	4	6	6	6	6	4	3
2	3	4	4	4	4	3	2

Figure 30. Available Movement for the Knight

The diagram depicts the number of moves available to a Knight when it is situated on each of the sixty-four squares of the board. One immediately recognizes that for this particular piece, the central squares are of paramount importance. From the corner of the board the Knight has only two squares at its disposal, and occupying either of them provides it with three times its current available movement on the following turn. All competitive chess players are familiar with the adage "Knights on the rim are grim," because they understand the inequality that exists between central and peripheral squares for the purposes of the Knight's movement.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>It is no wonder that Henry Knight nearly meets his demise on the edge of the Cliff With No Name. Metaphorically, he suffers the same disadvantage that Carroll's

The Bishop also suffers a similar fate when caught on the edge of the board, because it controls nearly twice as many squares when situated in the central block as it does on the periphery. This gives us some indication as to why it is valued slightly ahead of the Knight in open positions: it is simply able to take advantage of the chessboard's geography to control a greater number of squares from nearly any position on the board.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, when situated on the edge of the board, the Bishop controls only one less square than a centrally posted Knight, as the following diagram illustrates:

7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
7	9	9	9	9	9	9	7
7	9	11	11	11	11	9	7
7	9	11	13	13	11	9	7
7	9	11	13	13	11	9	7
7	9	11	11	11	11	9	7
7	9	9	9	9	9	9	7
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7

Figure 31. Available Movement for the Bishop

Because it has the combined powers of a Bishop and Rook, the Queen also lacks

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Red Knight experiences while on the perimeter of the Looking-Glass chess board.

'Elfride's father, Christopher Swancourt, is in many ways like a Bishop confined to the edge of the social chess board. However, when he comes to retrieve Elfride from Knight in the wake of their separation, he ignorantly corrals the reviewer with his accusations: "If you wished the marriage broken off, why didn't you say so plainly? If you never intended to marry, why could you not leave her alone? Upon my soul, it grates me to the heart to be obliged to think so ill of a man I thought my friend!' Knight, soul-sick and weary of his life, did not arouse himself to utter a word in reply. How should he defend himself when his defence was the accusation of Elfride" (332).

a certain amount of control when located on the periphery, but it easily compensates for this by controlling such a large number of squares. Its available movement table for an open board can be generated by adding the cells together for the Bishop and Rook pieces, so that it controls twenty-one squares even when stuck on the edge and an incredible twenty-seven when situated in the centre.<sup>5</sup> On its poorest squares it still outshines the abilities of the other pieces when they are located in their optimal positions. Ignoring for a moment the Rook, which controls the same number of squares from any location on an empty board, the Queen operates at 78% efficiency in the corner compared with a mediocre 54% for the Bishop and a dismal 25% for the Knight.<sup>6</sup>

The complexity of the chessboard's geography does not end here, for although the central squares give pieces the optimum number of available moves, there are hierarchies involving the ranks and files which also need to be considered. Because the bulk of each player's forces is typically spread across their first three ranks, these ranks become vulnerable when the enemy is allowed to invade them. The first rank is especially vulnerable for either side because the king is usually situated here for a significant portion

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<sup>5</sup>This is what makes Mrs. Jethway, Hardy's unstable Black Queen, such a dangerous opponent for Elfride. She brings herself to the centre of the social playing field early in the game and makes known to Elfride that she is willing to do anything to realize her vengeful goal.

<sup>6</sup>Like the Knight, the King is at its most restricted when located in the corner, operating at 38% efficiency. Because it moves in the same manner as a Queen, but only one square at a time, the King gains in movement when not occupying a border square. However, the King is a unique piece, for although it gains in ability when moving away from the edges of the board, it can not usually do so until the endgame because its capture spells defeat. The King has fewer avenues for movement on the periphery, but since the bulk of its forces are also located here, this piece typically finds the safest haven on the first rank.

of the game. On the board's periphery, the king has fewer available avenues for escape—five available squares on the edge and three in the corner, as compared with eight elsewhere—and is further unable to retreat. When surrounded by a wall of pawns meant to defend its position, the King can find itself victim to a first (or back) rank mate in which a player is unable to defend against the lateral check of an opponent's Rook or Queen either by moving the king or interposing the check with a defending piece.

The squares of the second rank are also quite vulnerable and frequently the subject of concern for the defending side. Like those that constitute the first rank, these squares can never be defended by friendly pawns, and units situated on them must rely on an appropriate arrangement of pieces for their defence. Not surprisingly, major pieces posted on the opponent's second rank during either the late middlegame or early endgame are frequently able to assume complete control of this critical line and prove fatal to the defending King. Also, one of the most common tactics in chess is to attack a particular square on an opponent's second rank with a combination of forces located either in the centre or on the flanks. The opposing player is often forced to concede an important square or suffer significant material loss that would decide the game immediately.<sup>7</sup>

The chessboard's vertical files also have their own hierarchical systems and either

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<sup>7</sup>The third rank is usually not as precarious as the first or second because in their initial positions, pawns defend these squares from hostile pieces. However, although it is less of a liability, the third rank is often targeted by enemy pieces and pawns seeking to pin or skewer opposing pieces that share common diagonals. By forcing these pieces to move off the third rank, opposing forces gain a springboard into the middle of one's camp by eliminating or lessening the effectiveness of the defending pieces. The fourth rank has its own peculiarities as well. The pawn phalanxes established on these squares typically determine the basic nature of the position, and whether it is open, semi-open, or closed.

expand or diminish in importance depending on a given position. The outside, or a and h, files tend to have less significance than the central files during the opening phase of the game. Since experienced players develop their minor pieces towards the centre, and since the rooks do not usually become active so soon, these files tend not to see much piece activity during the opening phase of the game. However, if the rook pawn is exchanged on either file and the path for the rook is opened, the squares along these files can form unobstructed thoroughfares into the opponent's position and bring about an immediate, decisive result.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, passed pawns located on the outside files during the closing stages of the game often decide a contest because the enemy King is decoyed from the important central squares to prevent promotion. The location of the a and h files away from the centre devalues them as potential strongholds for the minor pieces, but it is precisely this factor makes them very important once pieces are exchanged and the game drifts towards the closing phases.

The squares of the b and h files generally allow pieces more freedom of movement than the outside files, and as such, they tend to attract some of the minor pieces (and occasionally the Queen or Rooks) during the opening. Since the development of hypermodern theory earlier this century—with the innovations of Reti and others who promoted the philosophy of control of the centre from the flanks—these files have become home to pieces that influence the progress of a game from the relative safety of their own

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<sup>8</sup>An example of this comes to us from the game Kovacevic--Ree, Maribor 1980: 1. d4 Nf6, 2. Nf3 d5, 3. Bf4 e6, 4. Nbd2 c5, 5. e3 Be7, 6. c3 O-O, 7. Bd3 Nbd7, 8. h4 b6, 9. Ne5 Nxe5, 10. dxe5 Nd7, 11. Bxh7+ Kxh7, 12. Qh5+ Kg8, 13. Nf3 f6, 14. Ng5 fxg5, 15. hxg5 Rf5, 16. Qh7+ Kf7, 17. g6+ Ke8, 18. Qxg7 Bf8, 19. Qh8 Rg5, 20. Qg8 Nxe5, 21. Bxe5 Kd7, 22. Rh8 Bb7, 23. Qh7+, 1-0 (Tangborn 69).

defensive positions. The squares b2, b7, g2, and g7 often see the appearance of the fianchettoed bishop, whose ability to destabilize the advance of the enemy centre from behind a fortress of pawns makes these squares important positional strongholds. The b and h files are also home to the carrying out of a typical minority attack, in which a player's pawn centre is undermined by a rook-supported counterthrust on the flank. Once opened, the cleared squares of these files permit the attacker to go after the base of the opponent's pawn chain, and depending on the position of the castled King, there exists the possibility that avenues of attack for the major pieces will be facilitated.

The c and f files appear very much the same at first glance, but are in fact entirely dissimilar. The reason for this rests in the immediate protection afforded the four squares c2, c7, f2, and f7, in the starting position. Initially, the c-pawn is protected solely by the Queen while the f-pawn is guarded by the King. But the King and Queen are very different pieces, and while the player can easily protect the c-pawn by defending it with another piece or pushing it out of harm's way, this becomes problematic for the f-pawn on the kingside.<sup>9</sup> By advancing the pawn the defending player must worry about an assortment of dangers: (1) that the f-pawn will be forced to exchange itself and leave the file open for the opponent's artillery, (2) that the King will be subject to attack both along this file and along the h5-e8 or h4-e1 diagonal, and (3) that the King will be prevented from castling and have to remain in the centre of the board. Because the squares of the c-file do not typically lead into the heart of one's King position (as most

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<sup>9</sup>The Muzio Gambit that Elfride plays against Stephen aims to set up major pieces on the f-file in order to attack the weak f7-pawn.

games involve kingside castling) they can often be the source of a number of peaceful exchanges, especially among the major pieces.

The d and e files are the central files of the board and contain the squares on which the forces are for the most part concentrated. Control of the central files is vital, not simply because these squares give pieces the greatest availability for movement, but because here the pawn structures identify the sort of game taking place. It is usually only when the player understands the nature of what is taking place on the central files (i.e. whether the position is open, semi-open, closed, or dynamic) that he or she can begin to plan a course of action over the entire board.

The geography of the chessboard is also significant in the way that it deals with Euclidean space. While Pythagorean theorem can be said to apply to the chessboard for the purposes of linear measurement, it can not be said to apply for the purposes of movement. Linear measurement will show that a hypotenuse is always longer than either of the remaining two sides of a right-angled triangle extrapolated from a two-dimensional plane like the chess board, but the movement of a chess piece along such a hypotenuse does not necessitate it moving a greater distance than it would moving along one of the other two sides. If the chess board is bisected to form a right triangle and its hypotenuse is measured, it can be easily found that Pythagorean theorem holds true in terms of linear measurement. However, if we move the King from a1 to a8, it requires the same number of moves as moving it from h1 to a8, which is--in terms of linear measurement--a greater physical distance: "It is interesting to note--and in practice of considerable importance--that here the straight line is not the shortest way between two points. There

are a number of ways all equally short...The linear relations between ranks and files on the one hand and diagonals on the other, in other words between the oblique line and the straight, must not be overlooked" (Znosko-Borovsky 1-2). Consider the following diagram:

7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
6	6	6	6	6	6	6	7
5	5	5	5	5	5	6	7
4	4	4	4	4	5	6	7
3	3	3	3	4	5	6	7
2	2	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Figure 32. How the Chess Board Deals with Euclidean Space

The table clearly illustrates that although numbered squares are at various linear distances from the 0-square (a1), they are the same number of squares away as other similarly numbered squares (eg. all 4-squares are 4 squares away from the 0-square regardless of how far away they appear in terms of linear distance).

## 2. The Relative Values of the Pieces

Chess is further complicated by the concept of relative values, in that the powers of the various pieces are mathematically related to one another by a series of complex relationships. In his *Famous Game of Chesse-Play* (1604), Arthur Saul assesses the relative worth of the major and minor pieces in the following manner:

Next to the Queene for valew is a Duke, for by how much a Queene is

more in worth then a Duke, by so much a Duke is more in valew then a Bishop or a Knight, for a Duke is worth two Bishops or two Knights, by reason hee can giue a Mate with the help of the King, which a Bishop or a Knight cannot doe...I conclude, that a Duke is better then two Bishops, and for the Bishops they are better then the Knights, by reason they can giue a Mate with the King, when no other men are left to help them, which the Knights cannot doe, and therefore they are counted better then the Knights; but I had rather loose a Bishop at any time then a Knight, for his checke is more dangerous then a Bishops. (n. pag.)

While more recent studies have proven these assertions to be less than accurate, it is revealing how easily Saul contradicts his own findings when struggling to come to terms with relative values. He gives both Bishop and Knight the same value in assigning them one half the value of the Duke (or Rook). He then admits that the two Knights are a weaker combination than the Bishop pair, but claims he would never, given the opportunity, exchange a Knight for a Bishop because its leaping ability makes it a much more menacing tactical piece. This gives the reader the impression that the Knight's relative value is all at once greater than, less than, and equal to that of the Bishop, but the apparent paradox is an important step in understanding the concept of relative values.<sup>10</sup>

In *The Chess-Player's Handbook* (1847), Howard Staunton argues that "[a]n attempt to establish a scale of powers whereby the relative values of the several men could be estimated with mathematical exactitude, although it has frequently engaged the attention of scientific minds, appears to be an expenditure of ingenuity and research upon

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<sup>10</sup>Hargrave sees fit to give up his Knight to remove Helen's remaining bishop in their chess game because that particular piece of hers "troubles" him. Chess theorists refer to this as the Minor Exchange because bishops usually prove stronger than Knights in open positions and the bishop pair usually gives a player a definite advantage over either a bishop and knight or a knight pair.

an unattainable object" (34). Nevertheless, Staunton assesses the relative values of the pieces as follows: Pawn = 1.00, Knight = 3.05, Bishop = 3.50, Rook = 5.48, and Queen = 9.94. The difficulty with such an assessment, as Staunton acknowledges, is that relative values are contingent upon the location of pieces on the board:

So ever varying, so much dependent upon the mutations of *position* which every move occasion, and on the augmented power which it acquires when combined with other forces, is the proportionate worth of this with that particular man, that it would seem to be beyond the reach of computation to devise a formula by which it can be reckoned with precision. (34)

Since the time of Staunton's assessment, opinion has changed regarding the standard set of relative values given in historical and instructive texts on the game. In *Chess Fundamentals*, Jose Raul Capablanca seems to agree tenuously with Staunton's appraisal of the Bishop and Knight: "For all general theoretical purposes the Bishop and Knight have to be considered as of the same value, though it is my opinion that the Bishop will prove the more valuable piece in most cases" (Capablanca 24). He further goes on to add that "[a] Bishop will often be worth more than three Pawns, but a Knight very seldom so, and may even not be worth so much" (25). This seems roughly to coincide with the figures given in Staunton's table:  $3.50 > 3.05 > 3.00$ .

In his *Manual of Chess* (1947), Emmanuel Lasker differs from both Staunton's and Capablanca's assessment in giving the following appraisal: "[W]e know that *ceteris paribus* Knight and Bishop are even, either is *ceteris paribus* worth three Pawns, Rook *ceteris paribus* as strong as Knight or Bishop and two Pawns. Queen very nearly as strong as two Rooks or three minor pieces" (35). Edward Lasker agrees with this assessment in his *Game of Chess* (1972), assigning the relative values of the pieces as

follows: Pawn = 1.00, Knight = 3.00, Bishop = 3.00, Rook = 5.00, and Queen = 9.00. Nearly all contemporary authorities concur with this table, although they stress the point made by I.A. Horowitz and P.L. Rothenburg that "[m]uch of Chess stubbornly refuses to lend itself to convenient formulizations" (37). However, while a pawn is said to have a relative value of one in chess—the standard unit against which the major and minor pieces are assessed—it does not always maintain this value, because the disposition of forces on the board can give it a paralyzing strength in certain circumstances:

			n			n	r
				P	q	p	p
		k					
		B				P	P
						K	

Figure 33. The Relative Value of a Pawn

This position is given in Lasker's *Manual*, and the author utilizes it to demonstrate how relative values are always subject to positional considerations. With White to move, the advanced e-pawn certainly presents itself as having a very high relative value, since after 1. exd8=N+! Kd7, 2. Nxf7, White wins when the Black rook falls on the next move. The White e-pawn can therefore be said to have a relative value of 20.00 in the starting position, because it is promoted to a Knight and eliminates an opposing Knight, Queen, and Rook:  $-1.00 + 3.00 + 3.00 + 9.00 + 5.00 = 19.00$ .

It is easy to see that a pawn can have dramatic shifts in its relative value because of the possibility for promotion,<sup>11</sup> but the relative values of the other pieces can also undergo significant changes throughout the course of a game. The Knight and Bishop are said to be equal, and strong players often freely exchange them throughout the course of a game. But players of the highest calibre make a full assessment of the position before deciding when to exchange dissimilar minor pieces. Consider the following diagram:

		b					
p			k				
P	p	N			p		
	P		K		P		

Figure 34. The Importance of the Knight in Closed Positions

In *Judgment and Planning in Chess* (1953), Max Euwe analyzes this position by observing that "[t]he black Bishop is definitely bad—all the pawns are on squares of the same colour as the Bishop—yet this would not in itself necessarily mean a loss for Black. If it is White's move, he cannot win. But if it is Black's move he must lose by

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<sup>11</sup>Alice's promotion increases her relative value in the chess game, but her actual value appears to decrease. This seems to fit the pattern of Carroll's relationships with his female friends when they promoted from childhood to young adulthood.

*Zugzwang*" (51)<sup>2</sup> Here the Knight is stronger than the Bishop because it is not obstructed by pawns. Indeed, Knights thrive in such circumstances because the scope of the other pieces is reduced by the locked pawn formations that arise in closed positions. However, open positions present us with a entirely different set of circumstances:

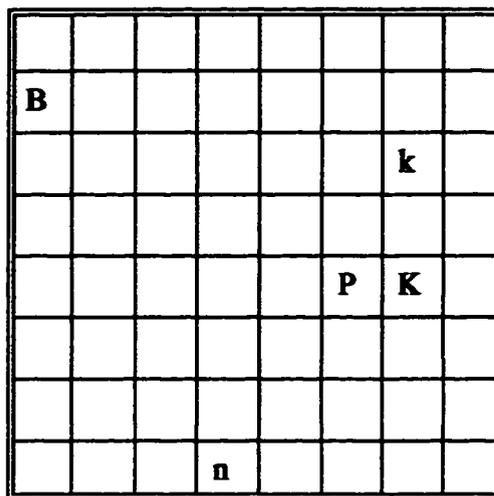


Figure 35. The Importance of the Bishop in Open Positions

Here, the material is nearly even and Black seems assured of a draw simply by manoeuvring his Knight to blockade the advancing f-pawn. But White to move prevents this by playing 1. Bd4, centralizing the Bishop and eliminating all four potential Knight moves in the process. The latter can not be said to have a relative value equal to the Bishop in this case because it is rendered effectively useless, a victim of the openness of the position. Before this move is played, the point values of the opposing sides can be calculated as four to three in favour of White (ignoring the attacking values of the Kings), but after 1. Bd4, Black loses the Knight (-3.00) and White's pawn is ensured of

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<sup>2</sup>Euwe gives 1. ...Kc6, 2. Ke5 followed by 3. Nb3-d4-f5 winning.

promotion ( $-1.00+9.00=+8.00$ ) for a decisive swing of eleven points.

It is not difficult to see that the relative values of the chess pieces depend on a player's ability to visualize combinations. Even experienced players sometimes find it difficult to realize positional advantages or make use of superior forces in a simple endgame, and instead allow the position to peter into a draw. Indeed, the complexity of relative values manifests itself fully when put into the hands of a human agency.

### 3. The Phases of Play

Chess is unique among board games in that it has three distinct phases of play—the opening, the middlegame, and the endgame—each of which is characterized by certain unique features. In order to be successful, a player must be well versed in current opening theory, have a thorough knowledge of basic middlegame positions and plans, and show a reasonable understanding of the fundamentals of endgame play. There are basic principles that must be understood and applied during each phase, though it is sometimes difficult to determine what phase a particular game is in because the transition from the opening to the middlegame or from the middlegame to the endgame is a complex process. What follows is a brief description of the particulars of each phase of play.

#### 3.1. The Opening

The opening phase of a chess game is characterized by rapid piece development, command of the centre, control of the initiative, and king safety. Players endeavour to mobilize their forces quickly, opening lines for the Queen and the Bishop pair through pawn moves and bringing their minor pieces towards the centre. Pawns are often sacrificed in the opening in order either to facilitate a more rapid development for the

player's pieces or to slow down the development of the opponent's.<sup>13</sup> Occasionally, pieces will also be sacrificed, although strong players will take care not to do so without significant tactical or positional compensation.<sup>14</sup> The rapid development of pieces is intended to take command of the centre, either through direct occupation in the classical style, or through the hypermodern approach of asserting control from the flanks. Without a proper foothold in the centre, a player seldom has any possibility of launching a successful attack. While the players establish their pawn centres, bring out their pieces, and attempt to control space in the centre, they are also paying attention to the *initiative*, the advantage of having the move. The player with the White pieces tries to keep the initiative that his or her first move has provided and the player with the Black pieces seeks to equalize and subsequently wrest control of the initiative.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the opening

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<sup>13</sup>An example of this strategy can be found in the Danish Gambit, where White sacrifices a number of pawns in an effort both to leave Black undeveloped and to launch a dangerous attack: 1. e4 e5, 2. d4 exd4, 3. c3 dxc3, 4. Bc4 cxb2, 5. Bxb2 and now Black must be willing to sacrifice material back to avoid succumbing to a quick knock-out (5. ...d5!, 6. Bxd5 Nf6, 7. Bxf7+ Kxf7, 8. Qxd8 Bb4+, 9. Qd2 Bxd2, 10. Nxd2 and material is even). Another example of the multiple pawn sacrifice is the Three Pawns Gambit, a romantic opening that attempts at all costs to build up an attack on the weak f7 square: 1. e4 e5, 2. f4 exf4, 3. Nf3 Be7, 4. Bc4 Bh4+, 5. g3 fxg3, 6. O-O gxh2+, 7. Kh1, and Black will have difficulty attacking the White King.

<sup>14</sup>Perhaps one of the most interesting gambits involving the sacrifice of a piece is the Cochrane Gambit in the Petroff's Defence. Here, White gives up his King's Knight for two pawns to put the Black King on an awkward square and to build up and a strong initiative in the centre: 1. e4 e5, 2. Nf3 Nf6, 3. Nxe5 d6, 4. Nxf7 Kxf7, 5. d4 (not 5. Bc4 because of 5. ...d5, 6. exd5 Bd6! when White's plans are thwarted) 5. ...c5, and although Black has the extra piece both players have relatively equal chances. Of course, Elfride's Muzio Gambit sees the sacrifice of both a pawn and a piece in order to bring the major pieces into play on the f-file.

<sup>15</sup>A brilliant description of the control for the initiative is found in John Self's description of his chess game with Martin Amis: "His second bishop lanced out, trapping my knight against a queen already smothered by her paranoid underlings. Oh, this was

usually sees the players bring their Kings to safety through long or short castling, although this always depends upon the dynamics of the position.<sup>16</sup> Once the pieces have been developed, the centre has been contested, the initiative has been determined, and the Kings have been brought to safety, the opening is typically over and the middlegame can be said to have begun.

### 3.2. The Middlegame

The middlegame begins with the players determining their respective plans and beginning active operations. The side with the initiative typically launches an attack either in the centre or on one of the flanks while the opposing side is forced to choose between passive defence or aggressive counterattack. In *Forty Lessons for the Club Player* (1986), Aleksander Kostyev argues that the concept of a plan—as developed by Steinitz—consists of the following fundamental elements: "material balance; the existence of direct threats; placing of the kings, their safety; the centre, the existence of a spatial advantage; the control of open files, diagonals and ranks; active placing of the pieces; pawn structures, weak and strong squares" (Kostyev102). By taking each of these factors

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hell, an awful dream of constriction, of pins and forks and skewers. I gulped scotch and looked for exchanges. There were two on offer, each with its strong disincentive—a doubled pawn, an opened file giving gangway to his centralized rook, which would then...Man, I could lose right away! This is really *serious*, I thought, and raised a hand to my damaged face...'Go on,' I said. Suddenly I was seeing light and smelling air. If I could inch my queen on to the third rank than I could cover the knight and release the bishop *and* threaten his...yeah" (Amis 374-75).

<sup>16</sup>It is not always advantageous to castle early in the game because although it brings the King to safety, it shows the opponent where this piece is to reside for the better part of the game. For instance, if the pawn centre is locked, castling may bring the King to the only part of the board where the opponent can launch an attack. Like any other move, castling should only be performed with positional considerations in mind and not simply as a safety move or in response to a similar move by the opponent.

into consideration, experienced players are able to formulate a plan that takes advantage of even slight weaknesses in the opponent's position and exploit these weaknesses to gain some sort of tangible advantage. The middlegame is the part of chess in which a player's creativity, intuition, and ability to calculate are of paramount importance. Here the player does not have the benefit of memorizing specific lines (as in the opening) or clearly seeing the results of a long sequence of moves (as in the ending). He or she must assimilate a vast number of general principles and apply them according to the needs of the position, always keeping in mind the advantage or disadvantage that has resulted from the opening and the possibilities that exist for bringing things into a favourable endgame. Combinations are at a premium during the middlegame, but the player also must be able to understand the positional implications of having an attack effectively repulsed and being forced to enter the final phase of play.

### 3.3. The Endgame

The endgame generally begins once forces have been reduced to the point where the opposing Kings can enter the battle with impunity. This may come about after a long and complicated middlegame phase or as the result of a rapid exchange of pieces along a central file soon after the opening. While the goal of the middlegame is either to force checkmate, win material, or otherwise to achieve positional superiority, the endgame is focused primarily on the efforts of both sides to queen one of their pawns and force their opponent to yield to the inevitable.<sup>17</sup> In this phase of the game, the King plays an

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<sup>17</sup>Although it is possible to reach a pawnless endgame, these seldom come about directly out of the middlegame. In these types of endgames (i.e. King and Queen vs. King, Rook, and Bishop) one side tries to use whatever advantage he or she has in order

important role as an attacking piece, threatening enemy pawns while attempting to usher in its own. Because of the reduced forces on the board during the endgame, players often have to look rather far ahead, even to the point of counting squares in order to determine whether their pawns queen first or whether their King can catch an opposing pawn. No longer are daring sacrifices or wild tactical forays in order; these are replaced with cold calculation and often laborious positional manoeuvring. Furthermore, whereas in the opening it is an advantage to have the move, in the endgame it can prove fatal because being forced to make a move that yields the opposition or is made as the result of *zugzwang* can turn a win or draw into a loss.<sup>18</sup>

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to win one of the opponent's pieces and bring about a decisive result.

<sup>18</sup>An example of how *zugzwang* can collapse a player's game comes by way of the following position: White King on c5, White pawn on e4, Black King on g4, Black pawn on e5. White to move should play c4, maintaining the distant opposition, and if Black then plays Kf4, White plays Kd5 putting his opponent in *zugzwang*, winning the e-pawn and the game. However, if White foolishly plays Kd5 attacking the Black pawn, Black responds with Kf4! and now it is White who is in *zugzwang* and must lose. This type of position is called a *trebuchet* and is featured in Martin Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note*.

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